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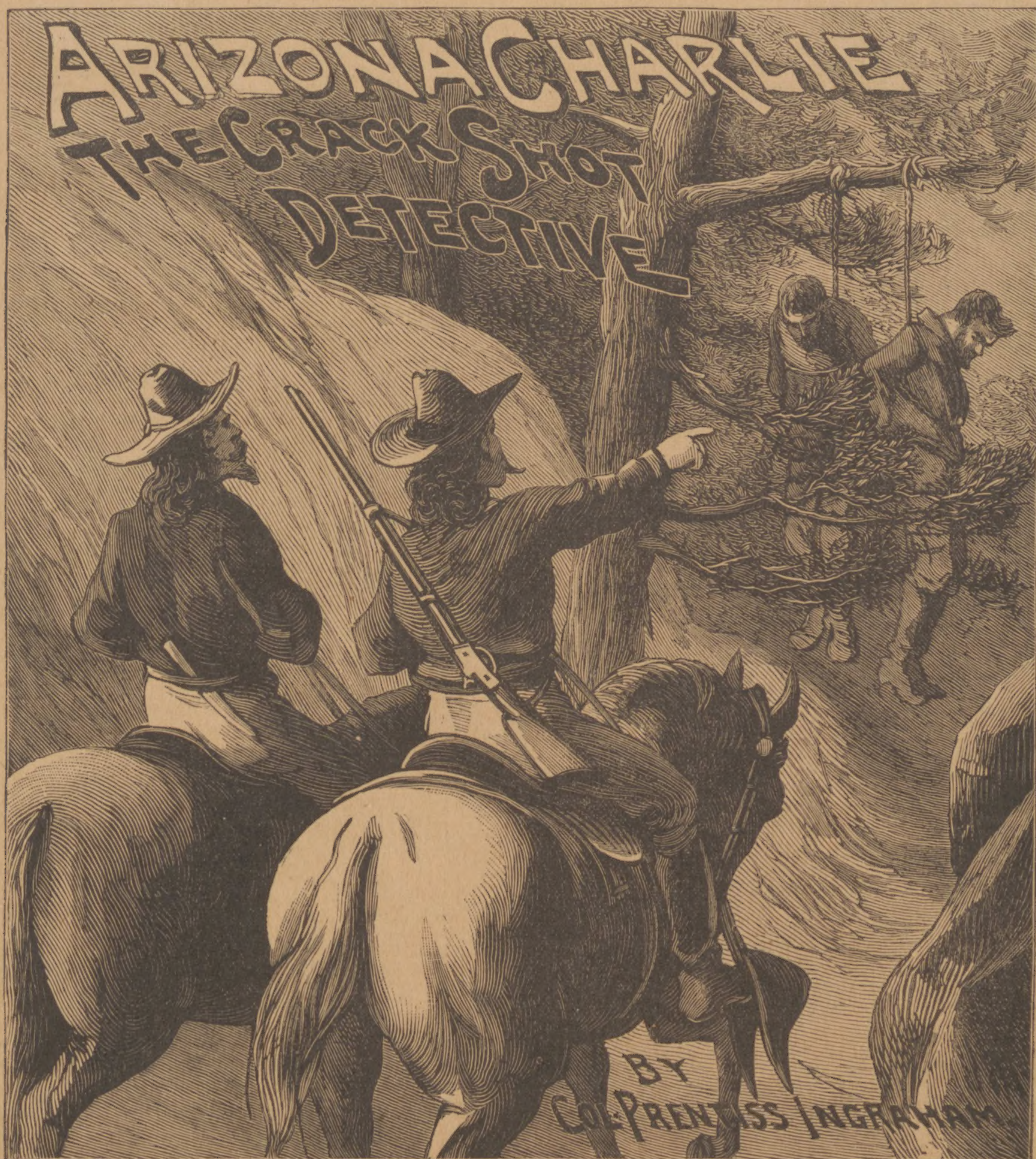
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"WELL, DIAMOND DICK, YOU ARE RIGHT," ADMITTED ARIZONA CHARLIE, "THERE ARE THE TWO MEN YOU SHOT."

Arizona Charlie,

The Crack-Shot Detective;

OR,

Diamond Dick's Desperate Wipe-Out.

A Romance of Northwestern Arizona.

BY COL. PRENTISS INGRAHAM.

CHAPTER I.

THE DEFENDER.

THE sound of a horse's hoofs rung out over the prairie, and the door of a border ranch opened cautiously, allowing a stream of light to penetrate the darkness without, and a voice said:

"Here comes father, now, mamma, so do not feel dread any longer."

The speaker stood in the light of the cabin, where her face and form were plainly revealed.

She was a girl of seventeen, perhaps, trim of figure and sweet of face, and she shaded her eyes with her hands as she tried to penetrate the darkness without, at the question from some one within the cabin:

"Are you sure that it is your father, Viola?"

"Who else can it be, mother, for an Indian would not dare approach the ranch in that way, and we have visitors very seldom among the pale faces?"

"I hope that you are right, my child. Is he still coming on?"

"Yes, mamma; the hoof-strokes grow louder and louder, and no one else would follow the trail so dark a night, but father—Ah! he has halted!"

The sound of falling hoofs ceased suddenly, and all was still out upon the prairie—as still as death.

The young girl stepped out of the door, away from the light from the cabin, for she knew that, should the coming horseman not be her father, but an Indian instead, she would present a very tempting target for a bullet.

The cabin was a large, stoutly built one, of seven rooms, and encircling piazza. A log fence surrounded a garden and yard of several acres, with outbuildings and corrals for stock beyond, and in the rear.

A stream wound near the cabin. There was some timber land, and boundless prairies stretched far away in every direction.

Had it been daylight it could have been seen that the place was an ideal frontier home, where dwelt some well-to-do settler, for the garden was well tilled and the yard was gay with flowers, while trailing vines hung upon the rustic piazza running around the entire cabin.

As she reached the gate a hundred feet from the house, Viola Stanley halted and listened.

It seemed that she heard a sound from afar off upon the prairie, as of several horses coming rapidly on.

Surely that was not the sound she had heard, when in the cabin, for now it but faintly reached her ears.

Listening attentively she was sure that the hoof-beats grew louder and louder.

This told her that whoever rode those horses were coming to the cabin, for the prairie trail led that way.

But the hoofs-falls that had first come to her ears?

The animal that made them could not have been a quarter of a mile from the cabin, yet now all was still.

The night was intensely dark, for it was cloudy, threatening rain, so that all was as still as death around her, save the chirping of a cricket in the prairie grass, or the distant and dismal howl of a hungry wolf on the trail for prey.

The crickets and the wolves Viola Stanley had become accustomed to, for she had dwelt for years upon the frontier, but the other sound, which had so soon and suddenly ceased, was what disturbed her now.

As she listened attentively the distant hoof-beats grew louder and louder until, suddenly, from only a few hundred yards away, came the loud, clear sound that had just attracted her attention, and she knew that the

horseman who had halted for a minute, was coming again rapidly toward the house.

She believed and hoped that it was her father, yet she must be cautious, and so she retreated rapidly to the cabin.

Up to the gate dashed the horseman; a rapid footfall was heard, and into the half open door stepped, not her father, but a young plainsman.

He was a young man, over six feet in height, straight as an arrow, with great broad shoulders, a sinewy form and handsome face, while his raven hair fell in waving masses down his back.

"Pardon me, but I overheard a plot to attack your cabin, as Captain Stanley was away from home, and I came here to defend your place." There is little time to prepare for the work before us," said the young plainsman to Viola and her mother, "and deadly work I fear, ladies, it will be."

CHAPTER II.

THE RANCHER'S DAUGHTER.

CAPTAIN LOYD STANLEY had been a gallant army officer and an old Indian-fighter, for years upon the frontier, but had left the service on account of serious trouble he had been led into with the colonel of his regiment.

Having stocked a ranch, he built a comfortable cabin upon it and went there to live, for all his worldly goods were invested there.

Mrs. Stanley and Viola, their only child, had been much with the captain upon frontier posts until the young girl reached her fourteenth year, when her mother took her East to finish her education.

After two years spent there, in which time Viola had proven herself a superior student, Mrs. Stanley decided to go West and rejoin her husband.

The captain had added to his home, improved his place in many ways, and as Mrs. Stanley brought with her furniture and all to make them comfortable, they felt that life would not be so desolate even when their nearest neighbor was a dozen miles away.

Viola's piano had also been brought along, and the young girl seemed perfectly happy in her wild prairie home, for she had always liked the free, untrammelled life of the far West.

A man and his wife did the work of the place, and the captain and a couple of cowboys looked after the cattle, so that all was prospering, and there was a prospect that in a few years Viola would become the heiress to quite a little fortune.

Her father gave her a buck-board and pair of ponies, in which she often took her mother for a drive over the prairies, and besides she had several saddle-horses, her rifle and shotgun for sport, and she was an expert shot and brought down considerable game, while at home she had her music, books and painting, with the care of the flowers with which their pretty home was surrounded.

As the captain said, the country began to get very thickly populated, for a church had been built ten miles away from Stanley Ranch, which in week days was used for a school-house, and in its vicinity had gathered a few settlers, while within a circle of thirty miles there were perhaps two dozen houses.

A country store had also been established at Cross Trails, as the settlement was called, a blacksmith shop and wheelwright, and Captain Stanley was the postmaster, the mails arriving and departing every Saturday afternoon.

The captain, too, was the justice of the peace and the one constable of the district, and now and then his duties as such called him to the military post forty miles distant, and known as Fort Crag, from the fact that it was situated upon a crag, or mountain spur.

It was decided, when Cross Trail City was founded that there must be a school to which the surrounding settlers' children could be sent, and as the people wished to be up with the times, the offer was made to Viola Stanley to become the teacher, at a salary of a hundred dollars a month, school to be held three days in each week, Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday, and for eight months in the year.

Viola accepted the situation, for little did she mind the ten miles' gallop to her school,

where some of her scholars came more than double that distance.

To her surprise she opened the school with thirty scholars, and these increased to over forty, a number of them being girls older than herself, some of them cowboys old enough to vote, one a handsome young rancher of twenty-eight, who though believed to be well-educated decided that he had much more to learn from the pretty young teacher.

The younger scholars were wont to say that this same rancher, Jack Joslyn, missed his lessons on purpose, to be kept in by Viola Stanley, who never showed partiality toward any of her pupils; but whether the charge was true or not, he certainly did show a most earnest desire to be as much with his teacher as she would allow.

Several months after school had opened, Viola was returning home later than usual, having been detained to open the mail, her father being away that night, when she was met just after dark by two horsemen, one of whom threw a lariat over the head of her horse, while the other wheeled alongside and grasped both her hands in his.

Viola was completely taken aback, and found resistance in vain, when one of the men said, gruffly:

"Oh, we've got yer, pretty miss, and yer father will have to pay a clean two thousand to find yer."

But, as the man uttered the words, there was heard the rapid clatter of hoofs behind, and a horseman dashed into sight.

The two men were taken aback, but at once arranged for flight with their captive, whose horse became restive and detained them a minute or more to get him in hand, and at the same time bind Viola's arms.

Then, just as they were starting, the brave girl, as a last resort to escape them, leaped from her horse and nimbly alighting upon her feet, sprung to one side just as the horseman dashed up.

Recognizing the horseman in the starlight, Viola called out:

"Save me, Jack, save me from those ruffians!"

CHAPTER III.

THE RESCUE.

THE one who had so opportunely for Viola appeared upon the scene in the very nick of time, was Jack Joslyn, her handsome rancher pupil!

He was a tall, fine looking fellow, with a handsome countenance, courtly manners, and dashing air.

Some years before he had settled upon a ranch twenty miles from what afterward became Cross Trails City, with a man double his years, whom he called "uncle," and whose money had started them in the cattle-raising business.

Indians had attacked the ranch one night, and the uncle had been killed and Jack Joslyn slightly wounded, but he had beaten them off, and won by his heroism quite a name for himself.

He was known to be somewhat dissipated, but after he began to attend Viola's school he had given up his wild ways completely, and the settlers said that Jack Joslyn was in love and meant to win the young teacher.

He certainly made a strong claim for her regard when he dashed up to her rescue on the prairie, when she appealed to him for help.

Just as he came up one of the men fired upon him, and Jack's horse fell heavily, but, quick as a flash the young rancher had returned the fire and one of the kidnappers dropped from his saddle.

Several shots were then fired in rapid succession, when, with a cry of pain the second kidnapper wheeled his horse and dashed away.

To this unequal duel Viola Stanley had been a silent but most interested witness, her hands bound behind her.

As she saw the fall of one of her assailants and the flight of the other, beyond doubt more or less seriously wounded, she called out anxiously:

"Jack, are you hurt?"

"No, indeed, Miss Viola, I am all right, and if I can catch that dead man's horse I'll go after yonder fellow, for I believe he is hard hit," was the response, as the young rancher came forward to where Viola stood.

"No, no, let him go; but unbind my hands, please, and I'll mount and catch the loose horse, for Dandy will come to me."

"Come, Dandy, come, old fellow," and at her call her horse came trotting up to her.

"It was good of you, Jack, and brave, too, to risk your life for me, and you know how much I appreciate it," she said, holding out her hand, as Jack Joslyn released it from the lariat with which she had been bound.

"I would risk a dozen lives to save you, Miss Viola, from every harm or sorrow."

"There, you are free now, and if you can catch that loose horse, I'll thank you and escort you home."

Viola grasped the lariat, leaped to her saddle unaided from the ground, and dashed away after the dead kidnapper's horse.

Jack Joslyn meanwhile turned to the fallen man, bent down and looked at him a moment, and then said:

"Fortunately the affair happened just here in this grove of cedars, for I can build a fire to keep off the coyotes, and leave the body here until my return to-night."

So saying he gathered some brush and cedar limbs which the wind had broken off from the trees, and soon had a bright fire burning.

He bore the body close up to the fire just as Viola rode up, leading the horse she had gone after, and which she had cleverly caught with the lariat.

She shuddered slightly as she saw the body, and asked:

"Is he really dead, Jack?"

"Yes, Miss Viola, my bullet entered his heart. See, here is the wound."

But Viola did not look, and said:

"And here is the horse, Jack, and he looks like a fine animal, though not so good a one as your poor horse Breakneck, which was killed."

"He is good enough, Miss Viola, and it is a fair exchange, for his master's life was thrown in."

"Do you recognize the man, Jack?"

"No, Miss Viola, except that I saw him and his companion at Cross Trails City to-day, and they rode out ahead of you."

"I did not like their looks, so I concluded to follow you, as you never will allow me to escort you home."

"No, Jack, it would not be right, for you know I never show partiality to my pupils," and she added, with a smile:

"But I shall be happy to have you accompany me home now."

"And I'll be glad to go, Miss Viola, and will leave this body by the fire until my return, for I'll borrow a horse from you to lug it into Cross Trail City."

With this Jack Joslyn stripped his dead horse of the saddle and bridle, put it upon the captured animal, and, throwing more wood upon the fire, rode off with Viola at a rapid gallop for home, for the young girl knew that her mother would be getting anxious at her late stay.

CHAPTER IV.

A SHOT FROM AMBUSH.

MRS. STANLEY was just beginning to grow anxious at Viola's remaining out late when she rode up with Jack Joslyn by her side.

Mrs. Stanley was not one of the timid kind, and between the ranch and Cross Trails City she did not look for any harm to come to Viola.

The captain had left that morning for Fort Crag, so that she did not expect him back before the next evening, and knew that Viola would have to open and put up the two mails, and sometimes the riders were late.

But when an hour had passed since darkness fell, and her daughter did not arrive, she went to the door intending to send the ranchman to meet her, when she heard the coming of the horses.

A moment after Viola dashed up and leaped from her saddle at the gate, and came in with Jack Joslyn.

Mrs. Stanley was a handsome woman of forty, one who had been well born and reared in refined society, but her father had been a regular army officer and all of her girlhood had been passed at a frontier fort.

As Viola came in she saw who it was that accompanied her, and she greeted him cordially, though she did not really like the young ranchero, perhaps because she feared that Viola did do so.

The captain she knew liked Jack, and was glad that Viola's influence had made him give up his fast life, yet she knew that her husband had no wish to ever see him a visitor for his daughter's hand.

"Mamma, I am late I know, and I was afraid that you would be anxious, but let me tell you that I owe it to Mr. Joslyn that I came home at all, for I was kidnapped on the trail, just at Cedar Ridge, by two men who said they intended to hold me for a large ransom."

"My dear child, how anxious would I have been had I dreaded any danger to you."

"And I owe it to Mr. Joslyn's being your escort that you were not taken from me?" and Mrs. Stanley was pale and trembling now.

"Mr. Joslyn was my escort from the scene where I was held up, mother, for he arrived just as the men had bound me and were carrying me off."

"Oh, Viola! what danger have you not been in!"

"That it was serious, mother, you may know when I tell you Mr. Joslyn came to my rescue most bravely, and though his horse was killed, he returned the fire and shot one of the men from the saddle and wounded the other, who, however, made his escape as Jack was dismounted and could not follow."

In a trembling voice Mrs. Stanley thanked Jack Joslyn for the great service rendered Viola, and was warm in her praises of his courage.

"It was my fortune to serve Miss Viola, Mrs. Stanley, and it came about through my having seen the two strangers at Cross Trails City, and being suspicious of them I followed your daughter when she started home."

Again Mrs. Stanley expressed her gratitude, and then the three sat down to supper, while the ranchman was sent to get a horse for Mr. Joslyn to lead back with him.

Immediately after supper Jack Joslyn took his leave, Mrs. Stanley asking him to meet them at church the next day and return with them to dinner, for she expected the captain to join them there by the time services were over.

Jack promised to be on hand, for he was delighted to receive the invitation, which had been seconded by Viola, and declining to have the ranchman accompany him he rode off on his return.

He kept his horse in a canter until he reached the Cedar Ridge, where he found the fire acting as a guard to the body, burning low, and a pack of coyotes hovering about, having scented blood, and only waiting for the dying out of the embers to rush in to attack their feast of human flesh.

But the cowardly brutes scattered as the horseman rode up, and dismounting bent over the body and raising it in his strong arms placed it across the back of the led horse, after he had placed on the animal the saddle and bridle he had left there and which had been taken from the slain man.

He tied the body on securely with a lariat, and was just starting to go and get his own horse when, from a cedar thicket two hundred yards distant, there came a red flash, a sharp report, and a bullet was sent to kill.

Jack Joslyn started, threw up his arms, staggered toward his horse a few paces, and fell heavily to the ground, while at the shot the coyotes tore away at full speed through the cedars.

CHAPTER V.

THE FUGITIVE'S RESOLVE.

THE companion of the man who had been killed by Jack Joslyn had been wounded, though slightly.

The bullet from the young rancher's revolver had struck him in the side, and believing himself severely wounded, he had fled from the field, intending to seek the nearest help.

But as he thrust his hand into his clothing to find the wound, to his great joy he discovered that the bullet had glanced upon the buckle of his suspender, right over his heart, and then cut its way out, the blow merely bruising but not really injuring him.

Instantly he came to a halt and glanced back over the prairie.

Just as he did so he saw in the distance a flame, which increased in size as he regarded it, and soon after flared up into a fire.

"He is building a fire in the cedars."

"Can he or the girl have been wounded, I wonder?"

"I will wait and see, for, after all, I may get possession of the girl."

He rode slowly back to the ridge, his eyes upon the fire, and halting some distance off, saw Viola lead up the horse of his fallen comrade, which she had lassoed, while Jack Joslyn placed the dead man near the fire.

The light of the blazing logs of cedar illuminated the scene so that the man could distinctly see from his position, a few hundred yards away, all that took place.

"I can slip up and drop him from his saddle and yet I could not catch the girl on that fleet horse of hers."

"Ah! they are off," and as he uttered the words Jack Joslyn and Viola dashed away along the trail.

"His building that fire means that he will return to-night, after seeing the girl home, and carry the body in to Cross Trail City with him."

"Well, the captain is away and he will doubtless come alone; at any rate I can wait and see, and if he does, then it will be my time."

"Yes, Jack Joslyn, your days are numbered, for I will avenge my comrade, Buck Benson, and get the large sum of money it is said you always carry about with you."

"Maybe after all, but for poor Buck's death, I may not fare so badly."

"It was a bad move for you, Jack Joslyn, the ranchero, to rescue that girl from Buck Benson and myself."

So saying the man rode up to the cedar ridge and dismounting staked his horse out to feed.

Aware that it would be a couple of hours at least before the return of Joslyn, he spread his blankets, after selecting the best spot he could for an ambush, and then crept cautiously up to the fire.

He gazed somewhat timidly at the white, upturned face of his friend, and said in a low tone:

"Poor Buck, you have passed in your checks at last and death has cashed them in the last game you'll ever play."

"We have been on many a trail together, Buck, have been pards for good and bad for years, and now you are gone."

"It may be a warning to me to mend my ways, but somehow I don't take it so."

"Maybe I will some day, but not until I can get gold enough to support me in an honorable life."

"Then too, I have some little scores to settle before I die, or give up the life I am leading."

"Good-by, old pard, I am on the trail to avenge you, and if you can see me back across the Dark River, you'll know that I did my duty by you."

As he spoke he brushed a tear from his eyes with his sleeve, and raising the cold hand of his dead comrade, grasped it in a last farewell.

Then he turned away and sought the spot where he had spread his blanket.

He seemed to know that the coming of his intended victim would awaken him, and so he lay down to sleep, and was soon as motionless as the dead form two hundred yards away.

The coyotes had scented a feast, and sneaked nearer and nearer, yelping in their whining way as they came, until, as the fire burned lower and lower they had gotten courage enough to creep up within a few paces of the dead body of Buck Benson.

Suddenly a sharp yelp in chorus from the coyotes awakened the sleeper in the thicket with a start.

He sat up and listened attentively, and distinctly he heard the sound of coming hoofs.

"He is returning."

"Yes, and there are two horses."

"Never mind, I am here to avenge Buck Benson, and if there be another than Jack Joslyn along, then he must also share his fate."

So saying, the man in ambush took up his position by the tree, looked to his rifle, and waited.

Soon after, Jack Joslyn came into the glare of the firelight, and ten minutes after the shot rung out from the thicket, and the ranchero fell.

CHAPTER VI.

A FATAL MISTAKE.

"THAT avenges you, Pard Buck," cried the man in ambush, and he boldly walked out of the thicket, while the coyotes scattered rapidly at the shot, sending up doleful howls of disappointment at the loss of their anticipated supper.

Rifle in hand, the kidnapper walked up toward his victim, who lay motionless after a few convulsive movements.

As he neared the fallen man, the two horses snorted in alarm, but the animal ridden by Jack Joslyn was tied to a cedar, and the lead rope of the other, bearing the body of Buck Benson, hung over the saddle-horn, so that neither could run off.

The kidnapper had gotten within twenty feet of the prostrate ranchero, when the latter suddenly moved, a flash and report followed and his bullet brought down his enemy.

Hardly had the man fallen before Jack Joslyn had sprung up and stood over him with his revolver covering.

"It was an old trick to play, pard, but it won the game."

"Are you hard hit?" and the ranchero bent over the kidnapper, who was writhing in agony.

"You have killed me, Jack Joslyn," he gasped.

"Well, that you may not do a like service for me I'll just relieve you of your belt of arms and place your rifle beyond reach," and the ranchero suited the action to his words.

"Curse you, Jack Joslyn, you have killed me."

"But I made a fatal mistake to come back to kill you, as I might have remembered that you bore a charmed life."

"Oh, yes; I am hard to kill, pard."

"But you call me by name?"

"Yes."

"That means that I know you."

"Yet I fail to recall you."

"Do you, or is it sham?"

"I do not know you."

"Well, it is true both my dead pard there and I have grown our hair and beards since we saw you, and changed our style of dress; but our names are the same."

"There is a familiar tone in your voice, now I listen to it."

"There ought to be."

"Who are you?"

"That dead body on that horse there was Buck Benson."

"Ha! then that means that you are Doc Daly."

"It does."

"Well, I did not know you, Doc Daly, for you have changed since last we met."

"Still, I would have killed you had I known you, when I caught you kidnapping Miss Viola Stanley, as I did."

"Well, it was out venture this time, and for money."

"Now see how bad my wound is."

The ranchero threw some brush upon the fire and by its light examined the wound.

It was a serious one, the bullet from the revolver having entered the chest, but whether fatal or not remained to be seen.

"I don't know whether it will kill you or not, Daly."

"I'm hoping it won't, and you might help me."

"What can I do?"

"I'll take you to Cross Trails City, where there is a doctor, you know."

"And get me hanged?"

"No, but what else could I do?"

"Take me to your home, let it not be known that I am there, and care for me until I am well."

"You could not stand the long ride."

"No, I'll take you to Cross Trails City and the doctor can care for you, for he will soon know if the wound is fatal."

It was useless for the wounded man to argue against this plan of the ranchero, so he was aided to his saddle and bound there.

Then Jack Joslyn mounted, and leading the two horses, the one bearing the dead

man, the other the wounded kidnapper, he started upon his way to the settlement.

It was midnight when he reached the cabin home of Doctor Dillon, and roused him from his slumber.

"I have a badly-wounded man here, doctor, whom I want you to care for, and, as I shot him I will pay the score," he said, and the two bore the wounded man into a room of the cabin where a cot was prepared for him by the doctor's Chinese servant.

"How did it all happen, Joslyn?" asked the doctor, as he examined the wound carefully.

"A shooting scrape out upon the prairie, sir, which I cannot now explain, as I have a dead body outside on a horse which I am taking to the lock-up at Keep's store."

"If he is dead there is no need of taking him to the lock-up, Joslyn," said Doctor Dillon, with a smile.

"True, but I do not know where else to leave him, and I am going to my ranch," and he added:

"What of that wound, doctor?"

"Not necessarily fatal, but serious."

"It was a close call, but, my man, I think you have big chances of recovery."

"Thank Heaven for that," said Doc Daly, while Jack Joslyn remarked:

"I am glad to hear the doctor's report, Daly, and I leave you in the best of hands."

"When I return to Cross Trails City I will come in and see you."

"Remember, doctor, I foot the bills," and the young ranchero departed.

Mounting his horse, he rode on to the rear of the store, where a log hut had been built, where unruly spirits were sometimes placed to cool off, and where a prisoner was kept while awaiting the coming of the justice of the peace to try his case.

The man sleeping in the store was aroused, and taking the key he opened the lock-up, and the body was placed in it.

Then Jack Joslyn held a long conversation with Nate Hall, the clerk of the store, after which he mounted his horse and rode on toward his ranch.

CHAPTER VII.

THE DEMAND.

NATE HALL, the clerk of Keep's store, was a good all-round kind of a man.

In early life he had been a bookkeeper East, but for reasons he never explained, had left there and gone West.

Trying mining, and finding it too hard work, he tried the life of a cowboy, and at last got a place as clerk with Kit Keep, a sutler, who transferred his business from an army post to Cross Trails City, where he picked up a large trade from farming, military and emigrant wagon-trains the settlers for seventy-five miles around, and the cowboys.

Nate Hall had become very popular as a clerk, and he had considerable influence in the settlement.

On Sundays he dressed well, went to church and invariably went home to dine with some settler and his family.

But he had a weakness he was not ashamed of, and that was his love for Viola Stanley, whom he had the vanity to believe he could win.

Whatever conversation occurred between Jack Joslyn and Nate Hall, after putting the body of Buck Benson in the lock-up, it certainly left the clerk of Keep's store in a very excited frame of mind.

He slept in the store, kept the keys of the lock-up, and generally felt his great importance.

Hardly had Jack Joslyn ridden out of sight on the trail to his ranch, when Nate Hall returned to his room at one end of the store, armed himself thoroughly, and then walked away in the darkness, apparently bent upon some errand.

He halted at the cabin of the blacksmith of Trail Crossing, and rousing him called him out and the two held a long conversation together.

Then the two men visited the home of the wheelwright, and another talk was had there, and three men it was who went from there to the next cabin.

At each cabin visited there was a recruit gained until the party numbered two-score men that just at dawn, halted at the house

of Doctor Dillon, half a mile from the store.

The doctor was still up with his wounded patient, and at a knock went to the door.

Nate Hall stood there, and to the doctor's surprise a large number of men, silent and ominous-looking, were behind him.

"Well, Nate, what is it?" asked the doctor.

"Its just this, doctor, we have a dead man in the lock-up and he wants company, and we have come to get the villain who is now in your house to put with him."

"There is no dead man in my house, Hall."

"No, but there is a live man in your cabin who soon will die."

"He is badly wounded, yes, but I have no fear of his dying."

"We have a certainty of it, doctor."

"Well, the man was brought here by Ranchero Jack Joslyn and left in my care."

"You must give him up, doctor."

"I told you that he was wounded, and seriously."

"That makes no difference, we want him."

"For what purpose?"

"Why to hang him, of course."

"Surely, Hall, you and your comrades would not hang a wounded man."

"Doctor Dillon, we try to have a peaceable settlement here, and horse-thieves, road-agents and men who run off with young girls shall not come here and not strike against a snag."

"Of what do you accuse this man, Hall?"

"I accuse him, and his pard, who is dead, of kidnapping Miss Viola Stanley, and trying to kill the man who rescued her from them."

"And we want him, for such men must learn a lesson that will be warning to others," said one of the crowd.

"So say we all of us!" came in a deep, threatening chorus.

"Well, gentlemen, I certainly would like to protect my patient, and see you give him a fair trial when he gets able to stand trial, and I hope you will reconsider your determination to hang him."

"No, we want him!" was the determined response.

The doctor shrugged his shoulders, and was silent.

He knew the temper of the men, and he made his living among them, so did not wish to quarrel with his patrons.

He liked Jack Joslyn however, and as he had placed the man under his care wished to protect him.

That it was out of his power to do so he fully realized.

All that had taken place outside, Doc Daly had overheard, and he felt that no mercy would be shown him.

Another moment into the cabin came ten men, revolvers in hand, and one bearing a lariat to be used as a hangman's rope.

Like a wild beast at bay stood the wounded man, but those who confronted him would have their way and were rushing upon him when, suddenly, through another door, bounded a tall form and the bold words rung out:

"Pards, this man is my prisoner, so you keep your hands off!"

CHAPTER VIII.

ARIZONA CHARLIE CHIPS IN.

EVERY eye turned upon the bold intruder who had glided into the room and so daringly faced them, while he uttered the words that showed he was there to protect the prisoner.

The kidnapper started back as he beheld him, and from his lips came words that showed that he feared the single man who had come to his protection even more than the two score Vigilantes who were going to hang him, wounded though he was, for he cried:

"My God! Arizona Charlie, you have tracked me down, and you are more to be feared than these half hundred men who thirst for my life!"

The one he addressed still stood at bay, a revolver in either hand, and his manner threatened the crowd of Vigilantes.

Tall, sinewy, with a stern, resolute face and long, black hair, dressed in cowboy cos-

tume, and armed thoroughly, Arizona Charlie was a typical hero of the plains.*

As the eyes of the crowd fell upon him, they beheld one who was a stranger to them, but there was that about him that showed he was a man to respect and fear.

Nate Hall being the spokesman of the party, when he saw that his followers expected him to say something, said, in reply to the words of the stranger:

"Say, pard, who are you that chips in when it is not your game?"

"But it is my game, and I hold a full hand of trumps, see!" and he held up his revolvers.

"I asked who you were?"

"Let me tell you, pards, that this man is Charlie Meadows, Arizona Charlie they call him down in the Tonto Basin country, where he is known, and he's a Secret Service officer of the Government," said Doc Daly quickly, and in tones all heard distinctly.

"Your question is answered, gentlemen; I am called Arizona Charlie, and I am a Secret Service officer, and as such I claim this man!" and the stranger glanced over the crowd of Vigilantes he faced, and still stood at bay.

Every man there had heard more or less of Arizona Charlie, for strange tales were told of his many daring exploits as an Indian-fighter and trapper of desperadoes.

But the humor of the crowd was not to give up, to a stranger, a man who had come into their community and had tried to kidnap the Belle of the Border, pretty Viola Stanley, and seeing that his comrades so felt, Nate Hall said:

"It may be as you say, pard, and we have heard of you: but that man has committed a crime in our settlement, and we are his self-constituted jury, judges and executioners, so you must yield your claim, or it will go hard with you."

Arizona Charlie smiled, but showed no sign of weakening, for he replied:

"My claim is a good one, for this man and his pard held up a United States paymaster going in his ambulance from Fort Defiance to Fort Wingate."

"Fortunately the paymaster had but little money with him, having paid off the troops at Fort Defiance; but that little the brave officer determined to defend, and he and his soldier driver were shot down and robbed."

"I was ordered to track down the murderer, and in this man I have found one, and the other is in this settlement somewhere, for they were together at sunset last evening."

"That is my claim to him, gentlemen, and he goes with me, for here is my badge of authority."

He raised the collar of his hunting-jacket as he spoke, and revealed a gold badge, a United States shield, upon which was engraved:

"CHARLES H. MEADOWS,
Special Officer,
U. S. S. S."

Arizona Charlie had spoken frankly, and showing his badge he had hoped would save trouble.

But, the crowd were in an ugly humor, and too many criminals escaped justice to allow this one to go free when he was in their power; and so Nate Hall again became spokesman, and said:

"See here, pard, I don't doubt you are what you say, and the other man you are looking for is dead and in the lock-up, and right here I hold the key."

"He was caught in the same devilry with this man, and his chips were called in by the one who gave the prisoner here his wound."

"As their crime was against our settlement we claim the right of punishment according to our views; so you just take hands off that man while we make an example of him."

"You intend to hang him?"

"Certainly."

"I have proof that he killed the paymaster and soldier, as I have said, and he will

* Charles H. Meadows, a ranchero of Arizona, and one of the finest shots, riders, and lasso-throwers in the Southwest. He is a man with a romantic and adventurous history, and one who has won fame in frontier warfare.—THE AUTHOR.

be quickly tried and as quickly hanged by the proper authorities."

"That is not our doing the work."

"Well, I hold him as my prisoner, and I warn you all, not to attempt to take him from me, for I shall do my duty."

"What, against two-score men?"

"I never count numbers! I shall do my duty and protect this man," was Arizona Charlie's determined response, and his face showed that he meant what he said.

Nate turned to his followers and asked:

"Pards, what do you say?"

"Shall we take him?"

"Yes, take him!" came in a roar from the crowd.

CHAPTER IX.

NATE HALL GIVES AWAY A SECRET.

ARIZONA CHARLIE did not move or seem concerned at the chorus of determined voices that cried:

"Yes, take him!"

There was no indication that he would flinch or swerve from his determination.

But as Nate Hall made a move forward he stepped quickly to the side of the cot upon which lay the subject of dispute, and the crowd hesitated a moment as they caught his eye.

"Say, pard, you want your prisoner to hang him, don't you?" asked Hall.

"To try him, and, if found guilty, to hang him—yes!"

"You have the proof of his guilt, you say?"

"I have."

"Then you are pretty sure he will hang?"

"Yes."

"Well, when we hang him you will be dead certain of it, and your object will have been gained."

"No, for my orders were to find the two men and bring them with me to the nearest army post."

"Do you mean that you would take life to defend him?"

"I mean that I would defend him with my life, and woe be unto the man or men who crowd me unlawfully in the discharge of my sworn duty!"

Nate Hall looked at the crowd again, while Doctor Dillon, who had been a most interested spectator of all that had occurred, said:

"Pards, I do not think you should interfere with a Government officer in the discharge of his duty."

"But we will, for we hang that man, and if that young fellow draws trigger on any of us, why, up he goes, too, officer or no officer!" returned Nate, sternly.

"Well, gentlemen, as I know your intention, I am ready to begin business, whenever you crowd me. I shall certainly kill the first man who makes a move toward me, and if you know me you know that Arizona Charlie always shoots straight to the bull's-eye," was the firm defiance of the dauntless Secret Service detective.

The crowd moved uneasily at this, but there were determined fellows among them, and one man could not back them down.

It was broad daylight now, and the sun was just peering above the prairie horizon and shining into the door over the heads of the crowd as they decided, as one man, to move upon the one who defied them.

Their first act was to try and frighten him by drawing their revolvers, but this movement on their part did not cause a change in the expression of the dead-shot's fine face. He stood there, with flashing eye and firm-pressed lips, the very impersonation of the dare-to-the-death athlete.

Another moment and a terrible tragedy would have been enacted there, but a stern voice without was heard shouting:

"What does this mean?"

"Captain Stanley!" cried Doctor Dillon, and the crowd swerved to one side as a man entered the cabin.

He was a person of fifty, with iron-gray hair and mustache, erect, military bearing and dark, penetrating eyes.

He was dressed in an army fatigue suit, but wore no brass buttons. His pants were tucked in the tops of cavalry boots, while upon his head was a broad-brimmed black slouch hat.

About his waist, under his blue jacket, was a belt of arms.

"Well, doctor, this does not look like a Sunday-school gathering," he exclaimed in a rich-toned, decided voice.

"Nor is it, Captain Stanley; on the contrary it is a hanging match."

"Ah! and who are the victims?"

"That man on the cot, sir, is wounded, and was brought here last night by Jack Joslyn, who I believe killed his comrade, and I was asked to care for him."

"In some way Nate Hall and his pards have learned that this man and his comrade attempted to kidnap Miss Viola last night, so they came here to hang this one, but were stopped by this stranger who says he is Arizona Charlie, a Government officer."

Captain Stanley glanced at the wounded man, then at Arizona Charlie, and while his gaze fell upon the crowd he said:

"Is it true that two men attempted to kidnap my daughter last night?"

"It is, sir," quickly answered Nate Hall.

"They held her up on her trail home, for she was late, as the mail came behind time, and but for Jack Joslyn who killed one and ran the other off, they would have carried Miss Viola away."

"This is indeed startling news. And you were one of the kidnappers of my daughter?" sternly addressing the wounded man.

"Who says so, except that gang who want to hang me?"

"I say so," retorted Nate Hall. "I say that you ran off, and Jack Joslyn saw Miss Viola home."

"When he came back, to bring the body of his pard into the settlement, you fired on him from ambush, but he got in a shot on you that brought you down, and then he made you a prisoner."

"Who tells this story?" asked the prisoner.

"Jack Joslyn told me—there, I promised not to tell," and Nate Hall looked very much crestfallen at the slip of his tongue, while a strange expression came over the face of the prisoner.

CHAPTER X.

ANOTHER DEFENDER.

NATE HALL seemed to be very anxious about having made a mistake and revealed a secret which he had promised to keep inviolate.

He glanced uneasily toward the prisoner, then at Arizona Charlie and last at Captain Stanley, who asked:

"Did Jack Joslyn tell you what you have said, Nate Hall?"

"Well, yes, sir."

"He rescued my daughter from this man and his comrade?"

"Yes, sir, and they killed Jack's horse, too."

"What have you to say to this, my man?"

"It's a lie, for Jack Joslyn wants to get rid of me to settle an old score between us, and so put up that job on me."

"The one to prove the story by, or disprove it, sir, would be your daughter."

The speaker was Arizona Charlie, and Captain Stanley said, quickly:

"You are right, sir. My daughter knows, of course; but, may I ask what is your interest in this man?"

In a few words Charlie Meadows made it known, as he had to the crowd.

"You have the claim, sir, and as a justice of peace and constable here, I shall sustain you."

"Do you mean to defend the man who treated Miss Viola as he did, captain?" demanded Nate Hall, irately.

"Jack Joslyn is not here, and it is not proven that the story is true until my daughter vouches for it. She will be here to church to-day, for I was to meet her here, but I came on earlier than I expected, and was going to breakfast with the doctor here, when I was surprised at the crowd gathered at his cabin, and I see that we are collecting the whole settlement," and the captain referred to others that were coming to the scene.

"But, captain, we are going to hang the man," urged Nate Hall, determinedly.

"You are going to do nothing of the kind. He is not proven guilty yet, and besides, he is wounded, so should appeal to your mercy."

"I shall hold him prisoner, and we will

know the truth to-day. But, even if he is guilty of this crime, this young gentleman, as a Government special officer, will take him in charge for a crime of which he is accused by the authorities who sent him here.

"That is the situation, my friends, so you must disperse quietly to your homes.

"Be the man what he may, he shall have justice!"

Captain Stanley was too well known in the settlement to argue with, and now, as he was on the side of law and order, every person present knew he would do his duty.

Not wishing to be at odds with the man whom he expected soon he would have to ask for his daughter's hand, Nate Hall responded:

"Well, gentlemen, when Captain Stanley decides against us I have no more to say.

"The prisoner is in good hands, and not one of us would wish to go against what the captain decides is right or best to do."

This being the general opinion, the crowd began to disperse, and Captain Stanley called Nate Hall to one side and questioned him closely as to what Jack Joslyn had told him.

Nate left with a very uneasy feeling, for he had not intended to give his authority, and the captain went with him to see the dead man in the lock-up.

When he returned to the doctor's he found breakfast was ready, and he sat down with the physician, with whom he was on most friendly terms, and Arizona Charlie, who had been invited to join them, the latter taking a seat at the table where he could keep his eye upon the wounded man lying upon the cot in the next room.

The Chinese servant of the doctor gave the prisoner what breakfast it was thought best he should have, and then the captain went in to have a talk with Doc Daly, who had expressed a desire to see him, stating that he wished to make a confession to him.

"Well, my man, you wished to see me?" he said as he drew a chair up near the cot.

"I do, sir."

"What have you to say?"

"There are two charges against me?"

"Yes, one brought by this young officer, Arizona Charlie, and the other that you tried to kidnap my daughter."

"Can you hold me here, if I make a confession to you?"

"How do you mean?"

"Not allow Arizona Charlie to take me away with him?"

"You prefer to remain here and be tried?"

"Yes, for if he takes me to the fort I will be tried for the murder of the paymaster and a soldier, and perhaps upon other charges, and I will be hanged, for there is no mercy in a military court."

"You will have to take your chances."

"Mind you, sir, I don't say I am guilty, only accused, and Arizona has no proof that he can give, though he will bring false testimony against me."

"Kept here by you I will be tried only for kidnapping, and I will offer to buy my freedom from you by a secret you would give all you are worth to know."

"Indeed! your secret must be a valuable one."

"It is so valuable that you would gladly set me free to know it, and if you will keep me here and try me, you shall know the whole truth, for I am sure you will pardon me after you have heard it," and the man's manner greatly impressed Captain Stanley that he did indeed hold some important secret.

CHAPTER XI.

THE TELL-TALE BRAND.

To the last words of the kidnapper of his daughter Captain Stanley made no reply, but rose and left the room.

He motioned to Arizona Charlie that he would like to speak with him, and the young borderman followed him out of the cabin.

"My young friend, I wish to ask you a question, if you will kindly answer me?"

"With pleasure, sir."

"You accuse the man in the cabin there of having murdered a United States army paymaster, and a soldier who was with him?"

"Yes, sir, he and his pard who was with him committed the murders between them."

"You know both men?"

"I do, sir."

"There is no mistake?"

"None, sir, for the man knew me, and we have met before."

"What is his name?"

"His name is Dockery Dayton, but he goes out here by the alias of Doc Daly."

"And his friend?"

"Bears the name of Buck Benson, though his real name is Benton Buckner."

"You appear to know them indeed."

"I do, sir, as two men of a band of road-agents, who once operated upon the lower trails, and who were known as the Mounted Miners, their mining operations being carried on in other people's pockets."

"I have heard of the Mounted Miners, and that they were wiped out by the Vigilantes."

"I was one, sir, who had much to do in breaking up the band."

"Some of them were killed, others were forced to leave the country, and their chief, Major Muerte, as he was called, it was said was killed, though what became of him no one seemed to be certain of."

"I have heard of him, also; but you say that these two men, the one dead in the lock-up and the wounded man in the cabin, were Mounted Miners?"

"Yes, sir."

"There is no mistake on your part?"

"The two men were prisoners of mine once, and I discovered that they were marked for life, through an order of their outlaw league, and you'll find the brand upon them."

"What was it, may I ask?"

"The letters *M. M.* pricked in India ink, blue, between the blades and hilts of a pair of crossed daggers in red."

"A strange mark, indeed."

"If you do not find the brand upon the breast of each one of those men, Captain Stanley, then I have made a mistake."

"Will you go with me to find out?"

"The man is wounded badly, sir, and might resist examination to an extent that would harm him, but Doctor Dillon could readily find out for you through an excuse to dress his wound."

"I shall at once ask him to do so, and I'll be on hand to see myself."

"If it is there, as you say, there can be no mistake, and if the same brand is upon the dead man in the lock-up, you surely have tracked down your two men; but what proof have you that they are the murderers of the paymaster?"

"They did not kill him instantly, as they supposed, but mortally wounded him, and I found him dying where he had fallen, some two hours after they had left him."

"He had heard all that they said, for they unmasked, believing him dead, so he saw their faces and heard them call each other by name."

"The shirt of one of them was open, and the paymaster told me that he saw the brand I have spoken of on the breast of the man whom his comrade called Doc."

"Pretty conclusive proof?"

"Yes, sir, and better still when one of them was riding a Mexican saddle that belonged to the paymaster, and the bridle also, while the other carries his watch, both having been seen by men I have met while trailing them."

"I can hang the man in the cabin, captain, and regret that the other one did not live to die at the end of a rope as well."

"There is no room for further doubt, Arizona Charlie, though I will get the doctor to give me a glance at that brand you speak of."

"Do so, sir, and then we will walk down to the lock-up and see if his dead comrade is not also marked as he is."

Captain Stanley called the doctor aside, and soon after the two went in to have a look at the wounded man.

"Captain, I am going to dress that wound again, and will ask you to help me," said Doctor Dillon.

"Willingly, doctor," and the two set to work, Doc Daly not once suspecting that he was being investigated as to his identity.

The wound was carefully dressed, and both the doctor and the captain saw upon the broad breast the brand which Arizona Charlie had said was there.

Then the captain left the room and went to

the doctor's stable, where, hanging near the horse ridden by Doc Daly, was a Mexican saddle and bridle, which had upon the silver band around the horn and upon the bit, the name of the murdered paymaster.

"There is no need for further evidence, Arizona Charlie, for I am satisfied that you have your man, and now I wish to see what secret he holds, which he told me was worth my making terms with him to give him his pardon in return for his confession," and Captain Stanley again returned to the room where the wounded man anxiously awaited his coming.

CHAPTER XII.

THE CONFESSION.

"WELL, my man, you say that you have a secret you wish to sell me?" said Captain Stanley, drawing a chair up by the cot of the wounded man.

"I have, captain."

"Are you ready to trade?"

"What is it worth?"

"My life to me."

"Your life is not in my keeping."

"How do you mean?"

"You are Arizona Charlie's prisoner."

"You will deliver me up to him, then?" anxiously said the man.

"He had tracked you and your comrade here—that is, following your trail in this direction up to last night, when, convinced that you had come on here, he rode into the settlement and arrived just in time to save you from the Vigilantes."

"You saved me, for they would have taken me from him."

"Perhaps, though I doubt if they would have lost their heads to the extent of attacking a United States officer."

"Yes, they would, though he would have fought them, for he's grit clean through, for I know him."

"Yes, you saved me."

"Then, in return, tell me your secret."

"You must promise to save me from Arizona Charlie."

"How can I?"

"Make terms with him."

"What terms?"

"Call him to the door and I'll ask him."

Captain Stanley did so, and as Arizona Charlie appeared, Doc Daly said:

"See here, Arizona Charlie, you intend to take me to the nearest military post, do you not?"

"Yes, when you are able to travel."

"What have you to gain by seeing me hanged?"

"Simply the knowledge of having obeyed orders, done my duty, and rid the country of a man whose crimes should have hanged him long ago."

"There is a reward upon my head?"

"Yes, and upon the head of Buck Benson; but I never take blood-money, Doc Daly, and shall not accept it in your case."

"Then it is only to do your duty that you take me in?"

"Yes."

"Now suppose I prove to this gentleman, Captain Stanley, that I can tell him a secret worth more than life to him—one that will save his daughter from far worse than death—will you be willing to turn me over to him to stand my trial for the charge against me of kidnapping his daughter?"

Arizona Charlie did not at once reply, and then he asked:

"Do you claim to hold such a secret?"

"I do."

"And Captain Stanley, you will honestly tell me if you consider the man's confession worth my giving up my claim upon him as a Government officer, and turning him over to you for punishment for the crime of kidnapping your daughter?"

"I will, sir."

"Under such circumstances, sir, I will yield my claim as secondary to yours," and Arizona Charlie turned upon his heel to depart, when, halting at the door he added:

"Of course, Captain Stanley, I understand that you would not shield such a criminal from justice, unless you felt that he has confessed that which gives him the claim upon you to do so."

"That is as I understand it, sir," was the captain's response, and as Arizona Charlie left the room he turned to the wounded man and said:

"Now to your confession."

"I have your promise that my life shall be spared, if you are satisfied?"

"Yes, and as the crime was against my daughter, I will claim the right to exercise clemency in the matter."

"That satisfies me, sir."

"Then to your story."

"Are you aware that your daughter has a very great admirer?"

"I am aware that she has many friends, but what has that to do with your confession?"

"Just this, that she has a lover who would have paid a large ransom for her restoration, had she been kidnapped, while you would gladly have given a couple of thousand dollars for her return to you?"

"This means that you did attempt to kidnap her?"

"It does."

"For ransom?"

"Yes, captain."

"But were frustrated by that gallant fellow Jack Joslyn?"

"Yes, he killed Buck Benson, and wounded me."

"I owe him a debt of gratitude I can never repay."

"He is in love with your daughter, is he not?"

"He is one of her pupils at school."

"You do not ask about the lover who I said would pay a liberal ransom for her return, had we gotten away with her?"

"Ah! to whom do you refer?"

"I refer to her outlaw lover."

"Man, what do you mean?"

"I mean, Captain Stanley, that your daughter has a lover who is an outlaw, and from all accounts he stands well to win her love."

"Do you dare insinuate that?"

"Keep calm, captain, for I insinuate nothing, as your daughter does not know the character of the man she is so deeply interested in."

"Who is this man?"

"He was known two years ago as Major Muerte, the chief of the Mounted Miners, the worst band of outlaws that ever dogged a trail."

"What! that man knows my daughter?"

"He does, and he has the best claim upon her of all her lovers."

"It is false! She does not know him."

"Not as Major Muerte, no, but as Jack Joslyn, yes," was the startling response of the wounded outlaw.

CHAPTER XIII.

FOE REVENGE.

At the startling accusation against Jack Joslyn Captain Stanley sprung to his feet, his face livid, his whole form trembling with excitement.

Jack Joslyn was a young man whom he greatly liked, with a character he thought unsullied.

The very fact of his going to school to Viola, caused him to admire him the more and he had said to his wife:

"He is nothing but an innocent overgrown boy."

Learning that he had risked his life to rescue Viola he had thought that much more of him, and now to hear the charge against him that he was none other than Muerte the chief of the daring outlaw band that had been wiped out two years before, the Mounted Miners, it hurt him to the heart and then came the thought that it was utterly false.

"It is the revengeful work of this man because Jack Joslyn foiled him in his effort to kidnap my daughter," thought the captain.

Then turning upon the man he said sternly:

"Jack Joslyn came to this vicinity with his uncle, and we respected both of them."

"The uncle bought a ranch and cattle, and when he was slain by Indians, Jack became his heir."

"Not a word has been said against him, except that he was a little wild, dissipated perhaps, and that he has given up."

"Now you charge him with being a murderer, an outlaw and a man upon whose head a big price was set."

"I so charge him, sir."

"And why?"

"From revenge."

"What have you to avenge against Jack Joslyn, other than that he thwarted your attempt to run off with my daughter?"

"That was all right, for he did not know me then, nor my pard Buck, whom he killed."

"What then?"

"When I failed to kill him, for I lay in ambush awaiting his return to do so, he gave me this wound, as you know."

"Well?"

"He recognized me when I told him a thing or two, and he brought me here to his doctor to care for."

"That was an act of kindness."

"Was it?"

"Yes."

"You so regard it, and so did I."

"But it was a trap."

"What kind of a trap was it?"

"He left me here, and we had agreed that he should protect me, say that I was not guilty, but had been forced by Buck Benson to help him."

"That would save me—see?"

"Yes."

"He was then to give me a lift and help me away, and that would end it between us."

"Well?"

"Instead he went to the lock-up with Buck's body and told that fellow they call Nate Hall to get a crowd together and come here and hang me."

"What motive had he?"

"The best in the world."

"What was it?"

"Well, he could wipe out, as though through no fault of his, the one witness against him as to who and what he was."

"Have you proof of what you claim he is?"

"Well, about as much proof as he has that I kidnapped your daughter."

"But he saw you do that."

"And I saw him commit crimes, too."

"How?"

"I was there," was the laconic reply.

"You were where?"

"Remember, I am talking to you in confidence."

"I shall not forget it."

"I am talking for my life and freedom."

"Yes."

"Selling you a secret."

"I know."

"I am doing so because I wish to go free, and in doing so I get revenge against Jack Joslyn for proving traitor to me and trying to get me hanged."

"I understand."

"Then I saw him commit crimes, for I was one of *Major Muerte's Mounted Miners*."

"You were one of that band?" asked the surprised captain.

"I was."

"And I don't mind telling you another secret."

"What is it?"

"It can do him no harm now."

"Who?"

"My poor pard, Buck."

"He was one also?"

"Yes."

"You confess it of yourself, too?"

"Yes, and if you wish proof ask Arizona Charlie, for he knows, as he and his young pard, Diamond Dick they call him, was the ones who made it so hot for us that we were forced to retire from business, don't you see?"

"Yes, I see," said the captain, musingly.

CHAPTER XIV.

DIAMOND DICK.

The captain was silent for several minutes, and he paced the floor in deep thought, his hands clasped behind his back.

He could see a motive in Doc Daly's telling the story against Jack Joslyn, that of revenge for capturing him, and thwarting his designs.

But could it be true?

At last he turned to Doc Daly and asked:

"Who is Diamond Dick that you spoke of just now?"

"Why, have you not heard of him, captain?"

"Yes, I have heard of him, yet know little about him."

"You see he is a dandy young fellow, a boss rider and dandy shot, who was captured by Indians and lived with them some time in their villages."

"An old hermit adopted him, and the old man had picked up a lot of stones which turned out to be diamonds, and a renegade white man, with a lot of Indians, killed him to get them."

"The boy took the trail to avenge his adopted father, and they say he did it in great shape."

"Then he came out to the New Mexican settlements, wearing diamonds and turned rancher, and he was called Diamond Dick."

"Arizona Charlie met him and they became great pards, and in the hunt after Muerte and his Mounted Miners, Diamond Dick joined him and together they wiped out our band."

"And he was the able ally of Arizona Charlie in hunting down the Mounted Miners of the trails?"

"He was, and when we met those men we always heard something drop, and it was odds it was one of our band."

"In fact they made it so hot for us, that, as I told you, Captain Stanley, our chief turned honest, joined your church here, went to school to your daughter and is an honored citizen while those of his outlaw outfit who did not turn their toes simply lighted out, and Buck and me were of the last named."

"Now he has hoisted his toes toward the daisies and I am wounded, flat on my back, and suffering with a choking sensation as though I had the rope fever, and if you don't save me I guess it'll take me off suddenly."

"So you are my doctor, captain."

There was a grim humor in the man's words, and serious as was the subject the captain smiled.

But his face grew solemn again immediately and he said:

"Well, Daly, you are either a most remarkable liar, or you have told me a story almost beyond belief."

"Prove it, captain."

"How?"

"Ask Arizona Charlie if he does not know me as one of the Mounted Miners?"

"I need not ask him."

"Why?"

"I know you to be myself."

"Ah! how is that?"

"You have the brand upon your breast."

"Great God! how did you know that?"

"Your dead pard has also the same brand upon him."

"How did you know it, Captain Stanley?" and the man became very serious.

"Arizona Charlie told me."

"Yes, he knows; and he and Diamond Dick kept tally of the number of double M's they sent off on the long trail."

Suddenly the captain turned to him and asked:

"Does Arizona Charlie know Muerte by sight?"

"No."

"Are you certain?"

"I am."

"It is strange that he did not see the chief, when he often did his men."

"The chief was always masked."

"He went masked?"

"Always; and but three of his men knew him, or, that is, ever saw him unmasked."

"Two of these are dead, and I am the one witness against him—see?"

"I do see your argument—yes."

"Now if it was Diamond Dick that was here instead of Arizona Charlie, why, you could have proof that Jack Joslyn was Muerte."

"How so?"

"He knows him."

"He has seen Muerte, then, this Diamond Dick?"

"Yes, captain, he saw Muerte in a gambling saloon once, and caught him cheating an officer with whom he was playing cards."

"He told the officer so, and a shooting duel followed, and Muerte fell, as all supposed, dead, for the bullet from Diamond Dick's revolver—and he only fired once—cut into the forehead of the chief."

* George B. McClellan, a man with a most remarkable career of adventure and romance in the West.

THE AUTHOR.

"It glanced on the bone, however, and cut its way under the scalp and out, and when Muerte was put in a room in the hotel until morning, he came to and made his escape.

"Some time after Diamond Dick was captured by the Mounted Miners, and Muerte, intending to kill him, showed him who was his captor.

"But Diamond Dick escaped, through my aid, for he did me a like service once, when the Indians had me, and so he knows the face of Muerte, and if he was here could tell you that Jack Joslyn is the outlaw chief I say he is."

CHAPTER XV.

THE CAPTAIN'S PLEDGE.

THAT Captain Stanley was more and more impressed with what the wounded man said to him, was certain.

The more he said, the more plausible his accusation against Jack Joslyn seemed.

It was a terrible thing to feel that the settlement had nurtured in its midst a man so vile as was Muerte, the Mounted Miner chief, said to be, that he had been his guest at his ranch, that he was the pupil of his daughter Viola.

That he could reform, as he had appeared to do, might be possible, yet could it not also be with such a man sham reformation for some deep purpose of his own?

It certainly looked so, if Doc Daly's story was true.

In a quandary as to what to say or do, the captain asked:

"Where is Diamond Dick now?"

"Somewhere about Denver, in Colorado, Leavenworth, Kansas, or Santa Fe, New Mexico, for he is a rover."

"He is not then where Arizona Charlie could find him readily?"

"You would have to ask Arizona Charlie that question, captain."

"How did you know that Jack Joslyn was here?"

"You see, when he broke up his outlawry, we stuck to him. Buck and me, and we came to these parts with him, along with old Frazer."

"Who was he?"

"He was the old man who raised Jack, as I understand it, having been left his guardian, and the guardian of his property.

"But he ran through with all of Jack's money and skipped West.

"Jack followed him, and found that he had just bought a ranch and cattle, and he forgave the old man, or pretended to.

"But he went to the bad after awhile, and they had to leave Nebraska.

"Jack then started the Mounted Miner band, and made some money robbing folks, and then old Frazer having settled near here on a ranch, he came to join him when he gave up the road agent profession.

"Then he found that old Frazer had him again, for he bought the last ranch in his name, and so Jack plotted to become his heir, and he did so, for he inherited that property very suddenly when the old man died."

"The old man was killed by the Indians in a raid."

The wounded outlaw laughed.

"Was he?"

"Yes."

"How do you know, captain?"

"There was a fight at the ranch, and Jack Joslyn beat them off though the old man was killed, and his nephew wounded."

Again the outlaw laughed.

"What amuses you so, may I ask?"

"Buck Benson and I were in the plot, and we were the Indians, and we had a dozen led ponies with us to make a show of Indians having been round, while we fired half a hundred bullets at the cabin."

"Jack shot the old man himself, and one of our shots wounded the chief accidentally."

"Good heavens! do you mean this?" asked the astonished captain.

"Yes, and more."

"What more?"

"Well, we bagged three Indians, Putes, who were friendly, when we were on our way to carry out Muerte's plot, and these served as the red-skins he used as samples of what he had done in the attack upon him, for they were rigged out as hostiles."

"Well, we went back that night, and Jack gave us twenty-four hours before he

came to the settlement to report, and we had ample time to get away.

"You all went out and buried old Frazer and the Indians, the doctor looked after Jack's wound, while Buck and me, having gotten our pay, and good pay at that, bade Jack good-by forever, as we believed.

"The next time he saw us he did not know us, we having turned fairly honest meanwhile and grown our beards.

"I had an idea that he did know us and wanted to get rid of us, so I just went into ambush for him, intending to avenge Buck and get all that Jack had with him of value.

"We had been nosing around, so knew how matters stood, and we thought we could hold a full hand of trumps if we ran off with your daughter.

"Now, Captain Stanley, I have shown you my full hand and you know the game and its limit, so play me square as you said you would."

Captain Stanley's reply was sternly given: "You have my promise, and I never break my word.

"By your own confession you have been guilty of crimes which would hang you a dozen times over.

"But, if your story proves true, you have saved my daughter from a designing villain of the blackest type, and you shall go free, as I said, even if I have to put you in the lock-up and then aid you to escape.

"Now trust me, and rest content while I go and have a talk with Arizona Charlie to see if he can tell me where to find this Diamond Dick, who you say knows Muerte, that he may say if Jack Joslyn is that man," and Captain Stanley left the room, his face pale and stern.

CHAPTER XVI.

ARIZONA CHARLIE'S PLEDGE.

CAPTAIN STANLEY found Arizona Charlie talking to the doctor, who had been busy answering questions from the curious regarding his patient and the happenings of the night.

Cross Trails City was excited, there was no doubt of that, and although Sunday was a day when the people came out to church, there were far more visible than was usual, among the several hundred population of the alleged "city" and its surrounding country.

Knots of men stood here and there discussing the affairs of the past night, and from the country, wagons and buck-boards were bringing in the church-goers among the elderly people, while the younger ones came in on horseback.

As I have stated, a large cabin, called the Hotel Stanley in honor of the captain, a wheelwright and blacksmith shops, a saloon and gambling den combined, Keep's store, and a score of houses, with the church, school-house, lock-up and post-office comprised the immediate "city," while the country people surrounding were happy in the thought that they dwelt near Cross Trails City, though the distance from it to their homes, which they called near, was, in some cases, nearly two score miles.

As the captain came out, Doctor Dillon started off to make a call upon a patient in the settlement, and taking the seat he had just vacated, the ranchero said:

"Arizona Charlie, for so every one seems to call you, I wish to ask you if you ever saw Muerte the chief of the Mounted Miners?"

"Often, sir, and have wasted powder and ball upon him, for he seemed to bear a charmed life."

"I mean did you ever see him face to face?"

"Ah, you mean did I ever see his face?"

"Yes."

"Not to my knowledge, for he always wore a mask."

"Then you would not know him if you saw him?"

"I could only guess at him, sir."

"Will you describe the man?"

"A man of six feet in height, with broad shoulders, slender waist, and fine form."

"He had long black hair that curled, I think, for I am speaking now from observation at the distance of sixty yards, the nearest I ever got to him."

"Have you heard his voice?"

"Yes, sir, for he has sworn at me and he speaks in an exceedingly rich tone, and very distinctly."

"It would be hard for you to swear to any man being he, if you saw one who was suspected of being Muerte?"

"I could not do it, s.r."

"Where there would be a doubt, I'd give the accused the benefit always, for it would be better to have a guilty man escape than an innocent one suffer."

"You are right, sir."

"Now, tell me if you know Diamond Dick?"

"Yes, indeed."

"Do you know him, sir?"

"I do not."

"But have you heard of him?"

"Yes, quite often."

"What kind of a fellow is he?"

"A dandy," was the emphatic response of Arizona Charlie.

"You were pards then?"

"We are now, sir, the best of pards."

"Where is Diamond Dick now?"

"At Santa Fe, where he has some interests in mines I believe."

The captain's face showed his disappointment for Arizona Charlie said:

"Did you wish to see him, sir?"

"Yes, particularly."

"If I wrote for him to come you bet he would do it."

"Does he know this Muerte?"

"You bet he does, sir, and well, and Muerte bears Diamond Dick's brand, for they exchanged shots once."

"I heard so."

"Dick caught him cheating and accused him of it, so shots were exchanged."

"Diamond Dick's bullet went where he aimed it, only Muerte's head was so hard the ball glanced and only stunned him."

"He captured Diamond Dick afterward and then he knew him as Muerte, but that clever boy who wears the diamonds got away from him."

"That is the story that was told to me."

"Well, captain, if Diamond Dick was here he would know Muerte among a thousand as he said that he had a face never to be forgotten if once seen, and that he was not a Mexican as all supposed him to be from his name."

"It was after Diamond Dick's escape that he went into the outlaw-hunting business with me, and together we cleaned them out."

"Yes, captain, that same Diamond Dick is a dandy."

"Yes, and I guess that Diamond Dick would say the same of his pard Arizona Charlie," said Captain Stanley with a smile.

"He has no reason to say anything bad of me, captain, for I act square toward my fellow man and woman, and it's the square deal that wins the game in the long run, though false plays may take a trick now and then."

"You are right there, Arizona Charlie."

"But now I have a favor to ask of you."

"Yes, sir."

"You said that you would not take a reward offered for a life?"

"Nor would I, sir."

"No blood-money for me, for I would not enjoy what I spent it for."

"Well then, to get money is not your desire in taking the prisoner, Daly, to the fort?"

"No, sir, only the desire to catch him and accomplish the duty I was sent on."

"Then let me tell you that Doc Daly can render me a service I can never forget, save my daughter from sorrow untold, and be the means of capturing one whom you shall have the credit of taking, if you will only relinquish your claim upon your prisoner here, giving me the prior right to hold him."

"Captain, Stanley, when there is a woman in the game I won't play my hand against her, and to save her sorrow will toss up the cards."

"Doc Daly is your man, sir, for I yield my claim," was the prompt reply of Arizona Charlie.

CHAPTER XVII.

A PLAN AGREED UPON.

AT the frankly-uttered words of Arizona Charlie, relinquishing to him the claim he held upon Doc Daly, Captain Stanley grasped his hand warmly and said with much feeling:

"You are very kind, Arizona Charlie, and you shall not regret your act."

"But now the people are beginning to come in to church, and I expect my wife and daughter to meet me here."

"This is an important matter, so I will bring them to the doctor's here and hear Viola's story of last night's affair."

"It would be best, sir, and have her tell it away from the crowd."

"I wish you to hear what she has to say, Arizona Charlie, for you must meet my wife and daughter."

"I shall be happy to do so, sir; but as I yield Doc Daly to you, I shall go on my way as soon as possible."

"Remember, I am going to leave you Captain Muerte, the chief of the Mounted Miners."

"Captain Stanley, I have every reason to believe that Muerte is dead, for I got it upon good authority that he was."

"Well, I now believe that he lives, and you shall have the chance to see the one I suspect of being Muerte, for he will return to Cross Trails City to-day, he told Doctor Dillon."

"I confess to a curiosity to see the man, sir."

"He is one I never dreamed of being a bad man, though he used to be a little wild."

"Appearances are often deceptive, Captain Stanley; but do you mean that you knew this man?"

"Oh, yes."

"Is he one of your settlers in this neighborhood?"

"He is."

"Then he can hardly be Muerte."

"My dear fellow, he is the man who saved my daughter from the kidnappers last night."

"Do you mean that he is the man accused of being Muerte, the one who rescued your daughter?"

"I do."

"Why, he is spoken of as a splendid, brave fellow."

"So we have always considered him, Arizona Charlie, and I am the only one now who suspects him of being otherwise."

"May I ask who makes the charge against him, sir?" suddenly asked Charlie Meadows, as though an idea had flashed through his mind as who was the accuser.

"Yes, Doc Daly."

"Captain Stanley, the man who captured Doc Daly he now accuses of being Muerte, and that looks revengeful upon his part, while he told you he had a secret for sale, and he may be trying to save his neck by charging his captor with guilt."

"You argue well, and I had thought of all that myself, but the fellow told so straight a story, and appears to know what he says so thoroughly that I cannot but believe him, especially as he brings you, and your friend Diamond Dick into his recital."

"And, as he said, Diamond Dick knows the man Muerte, and if he is alive could identify him."

"Yes, and I only wish you could."

"I could not."

"But you remember the general bearing of the man?"

"Oh, yes, sir."

"Well, Arizona Charlie, upon the testimony I have, even from an outlaw confessed, I intend to hold Jack Joslyn, and I shall ask your aid."

"With pleasure, sir."

"I shall meet Joslyn when he arrives, and have him go with me to the lock-up to see the body of the man he killed last night in defending my daughter, and I wish you to be on hand, have a look at him, and if you think there is any truth in the statement of Daly, arrest him."

"Remember, he must have Diamond Dick's brand, as Daly called it, that is a scar in the center of his forehead, where the bullet glanced, and you have his bearing to judge from and his size and voice."

"When you decide what to do come in and arrest him, if it is against him, or remain outside, and I will not let him suspect anything, and you can send for your friend Diamond Dick to see if he is your man."

"All right, Captain Stanley, I am with you whatever you wish to do in this matter."

"If I make a mistake it will not be you that he will hold responsible, but me, and if

he is innocent he cannot blame any one but his resemblance to Major Muerte."

"If he is Muerte then he will be safe in our clutches, and I would rather catch the chief of the Mounted Miners than have a dozen Doc Dalys."

"Well, we will soon know. But there come my wife and daughter, for some one has told them I am here," and Captain Stanley advanced to meet a vehicle that was approaching the doctor's cabin.

CHAPTER XVIII.

VIOLA'S STORY.

THE vehicle approaching the doctor's was drawn by two very spirited bronchos.

It was a buck-board, and in it were Mrs. Stanley and Viola, the latter holding the reins and handling the team with a skill that won Arizona Charlie's admiration at a glance.

Viola looked very lovely with her face flushed by the exercise of driving, and a jaunty slouch hat and plume upon her head.

She was of a dashing kind of beauty, with grand eyes and features that were cut in a refined mold, and most expressive, while there was something about her manner that was very fascinating.

She reined her ponies to a halt in fine style, and Arizona Charlie observed that, strapped upon the seat by her side, was a Winchester repeating-rifle, within easy reach of her hand.

"That girl is a beauty, and she has pluck, too," he muttered, and just then Captain Stanley called to him to come out to the vehicle.

Viola had caught his eye when she drove up, and she was struck with his tall, elegant form, his picturesque frontier costume and general bearing.

"Wife, this is Mr. Charles Meadows, known upon the frontier as Arizona Charlie."

"My daughter, Viola, Mr. Meadows," said Captain Stanley.

Arizona Charlie doffed his broad-brimmed sombrero, around which was a silver snake for a cord, and bowed low, while he shook back his masses of long black hair as a spirited thoroughbred shakes his mane.

Catching a good glance of the face of the young frontiersman, Mrs. Stanley held out her hand, for she was attracted to him instinctively and said:

"I am glad to meet you, Mr. Meadows."

Arizona Charlie took her hand with an air of courtly grace, and saw that Viola also wished to shake hands with him, for she said:

"Yes, Mr. Meadows, it was only last week I was reading mamma an account of your exploits, as an Indian-fighter, so you see we have heard of you."

Arizona Charlie blushed like a girl, but replied:

"I did not know that I was known away from my own range, Miss Stanley; but permit me to congratulate you upon your escape last night."

"Then you have heard of it, and you too, father?"

"Yes."

"And Jack Joslyn, my gallant pupil, where is he?"

"He was ambushed on his way home last night, and—"

"And killed?" cried Viola quickly, not knowing how her father was watching her, and had purposely worded his reply to note its effect, while Arizona Charlie was watching her too.

"Oh, no, he wounded the man who fired upon him and brought him a prisoner into Cross Trail City."

"Brave Jack! but where is he, papa?"

"He left his man here in the doctor's care and went on to his ranch, after turning the body of the dead man over to Nate Hall, who, finding out that you had been the one attacked, got up a crowd of Vigilantes and led them here to take the man out and hang him."

"Hot-headed Nate Hall!"

"I do hope he was not successful, husband," said Mrs. Stanley.

"He would have been but for Arizona Charlie here, who was upon the trail of the two men and saved the man from being hanged."

"Of course there was a row over my interference, and, but for the coming of Captain Stanley I think I would have been hanged along with my prisoner, ladies," said Arizona Charlie modestly.

"There would have been mourning in Cross Trail City, follow your hanging, from the way matters looked when I arrived, Arizona Charlie; but now, my daughter, I wish to hear your story of that affair last night?"

"Well, father, it is easily told, for I was delayed an hour to open the mails, which were late, and at Cedar Ridge I met two men who lariat my horse and then threw a noose over me."

"It seems that Jack Joslyn had seen the two men and noticed that they rode out on the trail to our ranch, so as I never allow him to escort me home, he followed."

"It was fortunate that he did, as I had been bound to be carried away and held for ransom."

"He was fired upon as he came up, and his horse killed under him, but Jack shot one of the men, caught on his feet as he fell, and the other man gave a cry of pain and fled."

"Building a fire, Jack left the dead man's body by it until his return, after escorting me home, and he rode the dead kidnapper's horse; but you say that he was ambushed coming back, and captured the man?"

"Yes, my child; but it is church time now, so go on to service with your mother, and I will join you afterward, for we have some business on hand now, and as Captain Stanley spoke he saw in the distance the familiar form of Jack Joslyn coming across the prairie, his horse on a run, the way the ranchero most always rode."

CHAPTER XIX.

THE ARREST.

NEITHER Mrs. Stanley or Viola had caught sight of Jack Joslyn coming in the distance, and so, with a word to Arizona Charlie about seeing him again, they drove on rapidly toward the log church a quarter of a mile away.

Hitching her ponies, Viola joined her mother, and they entered the church to find it crowded, for it was after service that the people expected to assemble and talk over the affair of the night before.

As Mrs. Stanley and Viola entered every eye was upon the young girl, who bore the ordeal bravely.

The looks she met, the bows and smiles, showed her that she had become a heroine, and the worthy parson gazed over his spectacles and gave a faint smile of recognition, while, when it came his time to thank Heaven for mercies received, he especially prayed in thankfulness for the rescue of the beautiful girl who had escaped from her enemies through the pluck of the gallant youth who was the instrument in the hands of Providence to smite the wicked kidnappers.

In the mean while Captain Stanley had hastened toward the lock-up, leaving Arizona Charlie to follow him and there get a look at Jack Joslyn.

The latter seeing Captain Stanley rode toward him, and joined him just as he reached the lock-up, where Nate Hall and several others had gathered.

They greeted Jack with a cheer as he rode up, while Nate called out:

"It's lucky you didn't strike the trail for the church, Jack, as the parson would forget his prayers and led off with three cheers and a tiger for you."

"But here's the captain, and he chipped in this morning and saved a heap of trouble I'm thinking."

"Well, Jack, I was wishing to see you, for I owe you much gratitude for the rescue of my daughter last night from the kidnappers."

"Don't speak of it, captain, for I am only too happy to have served Miss Viola."

"How is the wounded man, Nate?" and he cast a significant glance at Nate Hall.

"Well, he's about the same, I guess, for after you left we decided to hang him, when a fresh young fellow chipped in and took his part, and then the captain arrived and stopped the game."

The captain's eye was upon the face of Jack Joslyn while Nate Hall was speaking, and the young ranchero asked quickly:

"Who was the fellow you spoke of, Nate?"

"He is a special United States Secret Service officer, Jack, and his name is Arizona Charlie," said Captain Stanley distinctly, and with his eyes fixed upon Jack Joslyn as he uttered the words.

"Here he comes now, Jack," called out Nate Hall, and as Arizona Charlie was approaching Captain Stanley said quickly:

"Come, Nate, open the door of the lock-up, for I wish to see the body of the dead man there, and have Joslyn identify it as the one he killed last night."

Nate Hall obeyed, and the party stepped in to the lock-up just as Arizona Charlie approached.

They stood inside gazing at the body for some little time, Captain Stanley purposely detaining them there, and asking Jack Joslyn to describe the attack of the kidnappers and what followed.

As he did so, the captain stepped up to Joslyn and said:

"You say they threw a lariat over my daughter's head?" and in making the gesture the hand of the captain knocked Jack Joslyn's hat off.

"I beg pardon, Jack, but I am a little excited."

"Here is your hat," and Captain Stanley handed it to him, and added:

"Now give me the whole story."

Jack Joslyn obeyed, showing just how it all happened, while the captain said:

"You took big chances, Jack, for there were two to one."

"I did not count odds, sir, where Miss Viola was concerned."

"But you say the men wanted to hang the prisoner I brought in, Nate?"

"Yes."

"It is a pity they did not, for he can only be tried for kidnapping, and after his punishment is over, I fear he will be very revengeful toward you, Captain Stanley, and Miss Viola."

"I think not, Jack, as I saved him from being hanged, you know."

"I would not trust him, sir; but, what had that stranger out there to do with the case?" and Jack Joslyn glanced out of the lock-up door to where Arizona Charlie stood gazing quietly at the group of five men inside the log stronghold.

"Oh, that is Charlie Meadows, and he claimed that this prisoner was one of Major Muerte's Mounted Miners," the captain answered in an indifferent way, but with his eyes upon Jack Joslyn.

As he uttered the words, Arizona Charlie stepped quickly into the log-hut, and leveling a revolver at Jack Joslyn, called out sternly:

"And I arrest you, sir, as *Major Muerte*, the chief of the outlaws known as the *Mounted Miners*!"

CHAPTER XX.

IN IRONS.

HAD a thunderclap come from a clear sky those in the lock-up could not have been more startled than were they at the words and sudden act of Arizona Charlie.

He had been standing outside, watching what was going on in the hut, and he made up his mind to act, to take the chances of being wrong, and he acted promptly.

His revolver was cocked, and the muzzle looked squarely into the face of Jack Joslyn, while the forefinger of the Indian fighter was upon the trigger.

There was a serenity in the face of Arizona Charlie that showed not the slightest tremor of excitement, and his hand was as firm as a rock, but his eyes never looked brighter or more threatening.

"Surely this is some joke, or a horrible mistake," at last said Jack Joslyn, after a moment of silence that was painful.

He had turned deathly pale, and his hands twitched nervously, as though he longed to grasp his revolvers, and the thought to take the risk was in his mind.

But he saw that his death was assured if he did make the attempt, and he had heard of Arizona Charlie, and so wisely forbore.

His words were a relief to all, and Nate Hall added:

"It's no joke, for such joking among men

of your style, Jack, means the making of a grave."

"It's a mistake."

"It is *no* mistake, for I charge you, Jack Joslyn, with being the chief of the outlaw band known as the Mounted Miners," and Arizona Charlie's words were sternly uttered.

"It's a lie, as all can prove!" shouted Nate Hall.

"Be careful, sir, or you may have to disprove a charge against yourself," was Arizona Charlie's response, though he did not take his eyes off the man he held his revolver on.

"Captain Stanley, you, as my friend, and the officer of our settlement, surely will not allow this man, this stranger, to come here and make a charge against me of so evil a character?" said Jack Joslyn, appealing to the captain.

Before Captain Stanley could reply, Arizona Charlie said:

"Captain Stanley, will you kindly remove that man's belt of arms, for I do not wish to have to kill him, and I see that he intends to force me to do so."

Captain Stanley stepped forward and at once unbuckled the belt of arms and made a quick search for any other concealed weapon about the ranchero.

"Great heavens, Captain Stanley, do you intend to obey this man's orders?" shouted Nate Hall.

"Silence, sir, for I know what my duty is, and this is a special Government officer and acts with authority," was the captain's stern reply.

"Then you side with him against me, sir?" asked Jack Joslyn, in a tone of reproach.

"See here, Joslyn, you are accused, and upon authority it is hard to doubt, of being the fugitive outlaw chief, Major Muerte, and I must acquiesce in your arrest by this officer."

"It rests with you then to disprove the charge, to show yourself innocent, and if you do so, no one will more rejoice than I do; but now you are in this officer's power, and it is for him to prove the accusations against you if he can."

"If he cannot, so much the better for you."

"That is just the situation, Joslyn," and the captain spoke decidedly and earnestly.

"I'll trouble you to hold out your hands, Jack Joslyn," said Arizona Charlie, and the prisoner doing so promptly, he was quickly manacled.

He winced a little at this, but recovering his composure said with a smile:

"I submit as gracefully as I can, for, knowing my innocence, I can understand the mistake that has been made."

"All will come right soon, friends, for I can readily prove my innocence, though I must put up with being a prisoner for a short while."

"Now, Arizona Charlie, I hold myself at your service."

The calm submission of Jack Joslyn was a surprise to Captain Stanley and the others present, and Nate Hall said threateningly:

"You are right, Jack, to submit, as Captain Stanley thinks you are guilty; but I guess your time will come to hold this fresh young man to account for the insult he puts upon you."

Arizona glanced fixedly at Nate Hall and replied in his calm way:

"I am not so sure, Nate Hall, that when my friend Diamond Dick arrives, he may not be able to recognize you as a candidate also for the bracelets."

"Diamond Dick!" came in a gasp from the lips of Nate Hall, while the face of Jack Joslyn became livid.

Arizona Charlie glanced at Captain Stanley with a smile and said:

"Now, sir, I will take my prisoner to the doctor's cabin with me, for, immediately after dinner I wish to be on the trail with him."

"You know your duty best, Officer Meadows," said Captain Stanley, and turning to Nate Hall, who had not yet recovered his nerve, he said:

"Hall, see to the burial of this body, and the man who was his companion in the attempt to kidnap my daughter last night is in the doctor's care, and I hold him prisoner and am responsible for him."

"Yes, captain," answered Nate Hall, and his manner was almost humble now, the mentioning Diamond Dick's name seemingly having taken all his nerve from him.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE CAPTAIN'S ADVICE.

THERE were few people seen about when Arizona Charlie and Captain Stanley left the lock-up with Jack Joslyn walking between them.

The captain took the rein of Joslyn's horse which was waiting near, and led him on to the doctor's cabin, and upon the arrival there of the two with the prisoner, Arizona Charlie led the man into the room where Doc Daly lay wounded and said:

"Daly look at this man."

"I see him."

"Who is he?"

"He goes by the name of Jack Joslyn, and maybe he was christened that way."

"Who do you know him to be?"

"He was, when we used to run together, known as Major Muerte."

"What was his profession?"

"Stealing horses, robbing coaches, mails and killing."

"There is no mistake?"

"This is the same man?"

"There is no mistake, unless he has a twin-brother who is his exact likeness."

At this Jack Joslyn's face flushed, and he smiled in a way that no one could interpret.

"Now, captain, as the doctor has returned I see, and his cook has dinner ready, I will start upon my way with my prisoner," said Arizona Charlie.

"And where will you take him, sir?"

"To night I shall stop at his ranch, and to morrow go on to Fort Crag, and I would be glad if you would join me there."

"I will follow on this afternoon, when I have seen my wife and daughter, Arizona Charlie," was the reply of the captain, and he added:

"Yes, a visit to the cabin of Joslyn may give us some information for or against him."

"That is my idea," was Arizona Charlie's answer, and a quick glance at his prisoner showed that he was disturbed at the prospect of going to his own ranch, or pleased, which it was hard to say, for his face flushed and paled by turns.

The cook having an early dinner ready, as the doctor had a long drive before him to see a patient, Diamond Dick removed his prisoner's handcuffs, and the party sat down to the meal.

But Jack Joslyn had little appetite, and ate but sparingly, while Arizona Charlie enjoyed the dinner greatly.

Soon after Arizona Charlie ordered his prisoner into his saddle, and mounting his own horse, the two rode away, Captain Stanley promising to join them at Joslyn's ranch by nightfall.

Just as they rode away Jack Joslyn called out:

"It looks black for me, Captain Stanley, and I see that you believe me guilty, but all will come well yet, see if it does not, and you will be the first man to congratulate me."

"I hope you can prove yourself innocent for your sake, Joslyn, and because I do not wish to feel that I have been so deceived in a man; but, as you say, it does look black for you."

As the two disappeared over the prairie, church let out, and as the congregation began to mingle with those outside the news was spread from lip to lip of the arrest of Jack Joslyn by Arizona Charlie, a border detective, who accused him of being Major Muerte, the outlaw chief.

The excitement at once became intense, and there was talk of at once rescuing him, when Captain Stanley, who had hastily placed his wife and daughter in their buckboard, and told them to drive to the doctor's cabin and await his coming, said:

"Be careful, my friends, and make no mistake, for I have looked into this matter carefully, and had not Officer Meadows arrested Jack Joslyn, I should have done so upon the evidence I have of his guilt."

"Officer Meadows is in the Government service as a special detective, and he knows what he is about, and if he has made a mis-

take it is for Joslyn to prove it, and all will be well.

"Naturally, after his great service rendered my daughter last night, I would have been the first to protect him, and yet, in the face of facts, I say he must prove his innocence, so I urge you to make no mistake in this matter."

"He is innocent, and should be rescued!" shouted Nate Hall, and a cheer greeted his words.

Instantly the captain turned to Nate, and said:

"See here, Hall, when Diamond Dick comes you may have a chance to prove that you are what you are believed to be, so go slow with bad advice.

"You, my friends, do not wish to have an outlaw in our midst, if he can be proven to be what he is accused, and if innocent he can certainly show it to our satisfaction, so I urge you to aid me in putting down any mad act these younger men may contemplate."

"Right you are, captain," cried a leading settler, while another added:

"Yes, boys must be controlled by old heads in this matter."

Instantly the captain saw that the settlers were with him, excepting half a dozen of the young men, who were influenced by Nate Hall to show an ugly humor.

CHAPTER XXII.

VIOLA'S RESOLVE.

WHEN Captain Stanley felt that he had the settlers on his side, he made his way rapidly to the house of Doctor Dillon.

He wished to be the first to tell his wife and daughter the story of Jack Joslyn's position.

In his heart the captain greatly feared that his daughter really loved her handsome pupil, the young ranchero, and if she did, he knew that her distress would be great to learn of what he had been accused.

Therefore he was anxious to be the first to break the news to her that her lover might be an outlaw, for Jack Joslyn certainly appeared to be more deeply interested in Viola than was warranted by friendly regard alone.

Mrs. Stanley and Viola had arrived at the doctor's cabin and were seated upon the little piazza when the captain reached the house.

The doctor had gone off to make his professional visit, his servant was busy in the little kitchen and the captain saw, with a sigh of relief, that no one was there to startle them with the news he had to tell them.

His serious face, as he approached caused both Mrs. Stanley and Viola to see that something had gone wrong, and they anxiously awaited for him to speak.

"I wished you to come here, my dear, as I cannot return home with you to-day, for I must go to Joslyn's ranch and remain to-night."

"You know that the affair last night creates a great excitement in the settlement and yet there has that happened which dwarfs the other in importance, as one of our people has been accused of being an outlaw living among us in disguise."

"It was hard indeed for me to believe the facts against him, and I sifted well the story before I acted, but there is no doubt but that appearances are terribly against him, and he must prove his innocence or stand convicted."

"Who is he, father?"

"My child, he is one I little dreamed could be accused of the crimes placed against him, and one whom I am under the deepest debt of gratitude a man could be to another."

"Ah! then you refer to Jack Joslyn, father, for I know of no one else that you are indebted to as you are to him," said Viola.

"Yes, my child I do refer to Jack Joslyn."

"Of what do you say he has been accused, husband?"

"Of being an outlaw who has reformed and settled in our midst."

"Bah! Jack came here with his uncle, father."

"Yes, I know all that and more, I know that he is accused of killing his uncle, and—"

"His uncle was slain by Indians, papa, and Jack beat them off and was wounded at the time, as you know."

"His accusers tell a different story, my daughter, for they say that Jack Joslyn plotted to have white men, his old comrades, come as Indians and kill his uncle, that he himself shot old Frazer, and was wounded by accident, while several Piute Indians were shot and brought there to represent those slain."

"I believe this to be an infamous plot, father, against Jack Joslyn."

"If it is, Viola, he can certainly prove it, while if innocent the arrest will not hurt him."

"And you believe it against him father?" reproachfully asked Viola.

"My daughter, you know me well enough to understand that I am the last man to accuse any one, and it was hard for me to take action against Jack Joslyn in this matter."

"But I received my information in such a way that I would be false to you, to myself and the people of this settlement if I let it go unchallenged, for Jack Joslyn is accused of being none other than the outlaw chief known as Major Muerte."

"Oh, father! accused of being that vile monster?"

"Hush! it cannot be."

"Surely there is some mistake."

"So I believed, and I planned to see for myself."

"When I spoke of a detective being here Jack Joslyn turned pale, and when he faced Arizona Charlie, who arrested him, he was unnerved."

"I know that Arizona Charlie acted only upon the belief that he was arresting Major Muerte, and I am confident that he would not have done so had he felt the slightest doubt."

"Father, this is awful," and Viola shuddered.

"It is, if true, and if untrue, then Joslyn can certainly prove it."

"But I am to go to Joslyn's ranch and remain to-night, for Arizona Charlie has gone on there with his prisoner, intending to take him on to the fort to-morrow, so you, wife, and Viola return home, and I will come back as soon as possible."

There was nothing else to be done, so the mother and daughter started homeward, Viola saying again and again to herself as she drove homeward:

"I will save Jack Joslyn, for otherwise they will hang him."

CHAPTER XXIII.

ON THE TRAIL TO JOSLYN RANCH.

ARIZONA CHARLIE rode on with his prisoner out of the settlement, half dreading that an attempt at rescue would be made.

He was prepared to resist an attack, and was just the one to show that he would not be bullied, no matter what the force was against him.

That his prisoner looked for an attempt at rescue, there was no doubt, for he constantly looked back, and his face wore an anxious expression.

"You seem to know this country," said Jack Joslyn, as he saw Arizona Charlie turn into a trail that would lead him to his ranch by a short cut.

"I have been through here before," was the response.

"Yonder is the trail to my ranch."

"Oh, yes, but this is a short cut."

"How do you know?"

"I am following the trail of your horse."

"Ah! but there are other tracks on this trail."

"Very true, but there is only one where the horse has cast his left hind shoe, as has the animal you ride."

"You are observing," sneered Joslyn.

"It is a part of my calling, you know."

"So you are a ferret, are you?"

"How do you mean the word?"

"Are you one of the Rocky Mountain Detective League under General Dave Cook?"

"No."

"What are you?"

"I am a ranchero of the Tonto Basin."

"Captain Stanley said you were a special officer of the Government."

"Well, so I am."

"And an Indian-fighter, also?"

"Yes."

"A scout, I have also heard?"

"Yes, and a guide, for I am a borderman, ready for any duty I am called upon to perform."

"What authority have you for arresting me?"

"Well, here is my authority," and Arizona showed his badge of office.

"Have you any other authority?"

"Yes."

"Show it to me."

Arizona Charlie quietly drew his revolver and showed it to Joslyn, who remarked with grim humor:

"That is sufficient."

Soon after he asked:

"How was it you suspected that I was Major Muerte?"

"I have seen Muerte, though not his face, I admit, and your bearing is like his, your form and voice."

"Simply a coincidence."

"Perhaps, and yet I hold the resemblance close enough to arrest you, and it is for you to prove that you are not the man I charge you with being."

"I am not."

"That any man in your position would say to clear himself; but I have another mark of identification."

"What is that?"

"The wound in the center of your forehead."

"Ah! that was made by a bullet in a personal encounter."

"With Diamond Dick?"

"Who is Diamond Dick?"

"A miner, rancher, scout and all-around plainsman like myself."

"Yes, I believe I have heard of him."

"No doubt."

"Now tell me if Captain Stanley betrayed me, or set you upon me?"

"One of your old comrades told who you were, the man you wounded last night and left at the doctor's, and afterward got your pard, Nate Hall, to attempt to hang, so as to get rid of a dangerous witness against you."

"You are on the wrong track, Arizona Charlie."

"It is for you to prove it, Mr. Joslyn."

"Doc Daly acted wholly from revenge, because I thwarted him in carrying off Miss Viola Stanley."

"Not exactly, but because he knew that it was you who set Nate Hall upon the work of hanging him."

Jack Joslyn was silent for a few minutes, and then asked:

"How are you going to prove that I am Major Muerte?"

"I will prove it by one who knows you."

"At the fort?"

"No."

"Who is he?"

"Diamond Dick."

"Where is he?"

"I shall send for him to come and identify you."

"If he does do so?"

"You will hang, for Major Baldwin is not a man to stand any nonsense, and he has orders to rid the country of all outlaws."

Jack Joslyn wore a troubled look for a few moments, Arizona Charlie watching him closely, and at last said:

"Do you see yonder ranch?"

"Yes."

"That is my home."

"It was there your uncle lived was it not?"

"Yes."

"And he was killed there?"

"Yes, by Indians."

"His ghost never comes to haunt you?"

"I do not believe in ghosts, but I wish to say to you, Arizona Charlie, that when we reach the ranch I have a secret to tell you, one I have kept to myself under every and all circumstances before, but which I feel now, in self defense, I must now make known."

"Any confidence you repose in me, Mr. Joslyn, I shall respect, and if you can say anything in your own defense I shall be glad to hear it," was Arizona Charlie's remark.

"I will tell you the secret because you spoke of Diamond Dick's coming here to identify me," said Jack Joslyn.

CHAPTER XXIV.

JACK JOSLYN'S RANCH.

ARIZONA CHARLIE was more than ever convinced that his prisoner was Muerte from his seeming fear of Diamond Dick who could identify him when masked and the scar. Diamond Dick's brand was upon his forehead, while his voice had the same rich tone that he had noticed in the outlaw chief.

Assured that he had the right man he had stepped into the lock-up and made the arrest.

Now he was more than ever confident that he had his man.

The ranch discovered ahead was situated upon a hill, the cabin standing back against a low cliff, the end of a mountain spur.

The ridge and the surroundings of the cabin were heavily timbered, and from the cliff flowed a most copious spring that wound away in a rivulet into the prairie to tumble in a fall into a canyon.

The cabin was stoutly built, had a piazza along the front and was comfortable.

A short distance away there were several long outbuildings and cattle-sheds, a fenced-in garden, and other things to make a complete frontier home.

Cattle and horses were upon the prairie, under the charge of a couple of cowboys, who did the work of the ranch.

The two approached the ranch slowly, avoiding passing by the cowboys, as Jack Joslyn remarked:

"It will be hard for me to have my cowboys see me in irons."

"They may attempt a rescue, so to avoid trouble take the trail to the left."

Arizona Charlie was a man who never sought trouble and he at once obeyed, so they passed the cowboys quite a long distance from them.

Arriving at the ranch Jack Joslyn said grimly:

"Under other circumstances, Mr. Meadows, I could bid you welcome with good grace, but now I cannot be the hospitable host I could wish to be."

Arizona Charlie replied with a smile:

"I accept your good intention, Mr. Joslyn, and will play host myself."

"Why do you call me Joslyn when you believe me to be the outlaw Muerte?"

"A man is innocent in law until he is proven guilty, so I give you the benefit of the doubt."

"You are kind; but there is the key of my cabin, just over the top of that log," and he pointed it out to Arizona Charlie, who got it and opened the door, after he had unsaddled the horses and staked them out.

The door being thrown open, the shutters were unlatched from the inside and the interior of the cabin was revealed, strangely well furnished for a bachelor ranchero on that far frontier.

The two then sat down upon the piazza and viewed the fine scene spread out before them of the prairie dotted with cattle, the long, winding trail, Cross Trails City in the far distance and a range of mountains far beyond, with scattering ranches visible here and there.

"Now Mr. Meadows, I am going to tell you my secret, for within an hour or so the boys will be driving the cattle to the valley corral for the night and come here to prepare supper for me, for I am no cook."

"I am a good listener, Mr. Joslyn, and ready to hear what you have to tell."

"Well, sir, under no other circumstances would I make known to you what I will now do; but when my ignominious death upon a gallows will be the result if I do not tell you, I feel that duty to myself demands it."

"I should think so."

"Yes, I must betray another in self-defense, it being the first law of nature."

"Certainly."

"Remember Mr. Meadows, I am not making known this secret without the tremendous pressure to do so, as it is life or death with me—life to tell it, death to remain silent."

"I am not going to appeal to you for mercy, only that you will side with me until you are satisfied that I am what I represent myself, that I am innocent, in spite of the circumstantial evidence of my guilt."

"I will show you full justice, Mr. Joslyn."

"I believe that of you, Mr. Meadows, for you have the reputation of being a square man."

"Thank you."

"I know that you have sent for Diamond Dick to identify me."

"Well, if he comes?"

Let me make the startling confession that he will at once recognize in me Major Muerte, the outlaw chief of the Mounted Miners," was the really startling response of Jack Joslyn.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE PRISONER'S STORY.

EVEN Arizona Charlie believing Jack Joslyn to be Muerte the outlaw chief, was amazed at his startling confession that Diamond Dick when he came, would recognize him as such.

Jack Joslyn's face wore a strange expression, one that Arizona Charlie could not read.

He was silent a moment after what seemed a confession that he was none other than Muerte but then said, speaking slowly, and as though he was thinking of the past rather than the present:

"Mr. Meadows, I was well born, my father having been an army officer, and my mother a belle and an heiress."

"I was reared on the Texas frontier, where my father was stationed for years, and there I gained a love for wild life, for I was constantly with the scouts, guides and soldiers."

"I had a desire to enter the army, and was prepared to do so, for I had studied hard to pass my examination and go to West Point."

"But let me tell you that I had a brother who was the pet of my parents."

"He was a good sort of fellow, always fawning about my mother, always trying to curry favor with my father, and never being caught in any scrape."

"He was simply too smart to be caught, that is all, and I was punished for all that he did wrong as well as for my own sins."

"Well, he was sent to West Point instead of me, and I was said to be only fit to become a cowboy or scout."

"The second year he was at the Academy he was dismissed for some wrong act, and he was sent to college and money given him to live like a young aristocrat."

"He was dismissed from college, as he had been from West Point, and in each case our parents believed his stories, that he was innocent, other boys being the guilty ones and the Faculty all wrong."

"He came back to the fort where my father was then stationed and where I was making my living as a scout, and independent of my parents."

"He put on airs at once, had quarters furnished for him where the bachelor officers lived, and began to lead a pretty gay life."

"He treated me as he did any of the other scouts, and when I went to call on him and welcome him back, after my return from a long scouting expedition, he did not even shake hands with me or ask me to be seated."

"From that day I cut his acquaintance, for when I told my parents how he had treated me they said that I had never acted the part of a brother toward him."

"In fact, they sided with him in everything, never once seeing his faults."

"Well, Mr. Meadows, this went on until at last a climax came when a soldier was shot down one night while on duty, by one whom he halted as he was trying to make his way to the paymaster's quarters, that officer being absent."

"The soldier lived just long enough to say that I was the one who shot him."

"I had started out on a scout that night at sunset, and halting a few miles out, to camp for supper, my horse pulled away from me and ran back to the fort."

"It was moonlight and I followed him to the stockade wall, where he halted, the rein catching upon a splinter of the fence."

"It was just opposite where the paymaster's quarters were, and the sentinel who was shot stood not far away and said that the man who had killed him had scaled the stockade."

"Unfortunately for myself, I had mounted my horse and had ridden right back to my camp, not seeing any one at the fort."

"I was in debt, for I admit I gambled and was extravagant, owing the sutlers and my comrades considerable money, and I was in hard luck."

"The paymaster had received a large sum of money that day to pay off the troops and of course it was said I was going to his quarters to rob him, he being over at the club."

"The dying confession of the soldier settled it as to my being guilty, and scouts and soldiers were sent in pursuit."

"Fortunately for me, I came upon one old scout who was the first to trail me."

"At the risk of my life I had saved him from the Indians one day, when he was wounded, and he had never forgotten it."

"He believed me guilty of killing the soldier, but to save me had come to warn me to fly, for I would be hanged if taken."

"I took his advice and fled, for I saw no hope otherwise to save my life after the dying confession of the soldier," and Jack Joslyn paused as though much moved with the memories called up by his story to Arizona Charlie.

CHAPTER XXVI.

JACK JOSLYN'S SECRET.

ARIZONA CHARLIE had listened with deep interest to the story told by Jack Joslyn.

The manner of the man indicated honesty and truth, and he seemed to feel the bitterness of what had befallen him.

His captor made no comment, however, but simply waited until he cared to renew his story.

He felt that there was more to tell.

At last, with a sigh, Jack Joslyn began again to talk.

"It may have been a mistake of mine, Mr. Meadows, to go away and not return and stand trial."

"But my old scout put it to me in such strong colors, how the trail of my horse had been found back from my camp to the fort, and that he had evidently been hitched right at the stockade near the paymaster's quarters, that the ground was soft just there, and my own tracks were visible, and more, that I was known to be in debt and bad luck, and had asked to go upon the scouting expedition on which I had started, added to which was the soldier's confession that I saw no alternative but flight."

"I did fly, and I went into Mexico."

"In my heart I felt who the guilty man was, that it was my brother."

"I felt that he had dressed in similar garb to me and had tried to rob the paymaster, for he was in debt also, and my parents had at last shut down upon him as far as giving him money was concerned, as lavishly as they had been doing."

"I could never have proved it, however, if I had tried, and more, in spite of all, I was too much attached to my brother to have him go to the gallows when I could save him by sacrificing myself."

"These are the reasons I took the blame, and became, as it were, a fugitive from justice."

"I roved about in Mexico, California and Utah, and in the last State I met my Uncle Frazer, and from him I learned that my brother had become dissipated and gambling heavily, owed large sums which my parents could not pay, for he had ruined them financially by forging their name and drawn every dollar they had in bank."

"Then my father threatened to prosecute him, and he left the fort."

"He, too, went to Mexico, got into a duel there in which he killed a Mexican officer, and then fled back into the United States, where he became connected with a band of outlaws, it was said."

"My uncle also told me that many believed that he, not I, had been the one who killed the soldier, but upon this subject I had nothing to say, and I joined my uncle in his ranch, this one, and he made me his heir."

"One day in New Mexico, where I went to buy cattle, soon after coming here, I came face to face with my brother, and he at once drew his revolver and fired upon me."

"This scar in my forehead is where his bullet struck, and it knocked me from my horse and I was left for dead, for it stunned me."

"When I came to consciousness I found my horse gone, and I had been robbed."

"I made my way to a hacienda, and was told, from the description I gave of my brother, that it was Major Muerte, the chief of the Mounted Miners who had shot me, and that he always went masked, and I remembered then that I had seen a black mask hanging by a ribbon about his neck, even in the glance I had of him before he shot me."

"Now, Mr. Meadows, you know the story of my life, how I have been the creature of unfortunate circumstances, and that again I have to suffer for the crimes of my wicked brother."

"I have listened to your story with deepest interest, Mr. Joslyn; but may I ask, was the resemblance between you and your brother so great that you could be mistaken for him constantly?"

"Ah! I forgot to tell you that my brother and myself were twins."

"That accounts for it, then."

"Yes, for we are of the same size, build, our mannerisms were similar, and our bearing and walk even, while we were so alike in face that our parents hardly knew us apart."

"I have known such cases, sir."

"It has been the cause of my ruined life, Mr. Meadows, and to you only have I told the true story of my career, since I met my uncle whom I came here with, and I have made it known to you that you might be lenient with me until you ascertain the proof of what I have told you."

"I certainly shall give you every chance to prove yourself innocent, Mr. Joslyn, but, see, yonder comes Captain Stanley," and Arizona Charlie pointed far across the prairie to where a horseman was visible, coming along at a gallop toward the ranch.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE WARNING.

CAPTAIN STANLEY was not very long in reaching the ranch at the pace he was riding, and he soon joined Arizona Charlie and his prisoner on the piazza.

That he had something of importance to communicate Arizona Charlie saw at a glance, and said:

"How was all at Cross Trails City going on when you left, captain?"

"That is just what I wish to tell you, Meadows, and I pushed ahead to do so."

"Anything wrong, sir?" asked Joslyn, anxiously.

"Yes, for that hot-headed fool, Nate Hall, does not seem inclined to listen to reason, and has put Bert Rosser and his immediate pards up to rescuing you, Joslyn."

"They will not all live to see the result of the attempt," was the very quiet but significant remark of Charles Meadows.

"It is foolish for them to fight against the inevitable, with the law to back it," said Jack Joslyn.

"The wise heads at once sided with me, Joslyn, that as you had been arrested upon the charge of being Muerte, that you should have a chance to prove your innocence, and if you did not the settlement would be fortunate in having you found out as a villain."

"Remarkably fortunate, sir," said Joslyn.

"But Nate Hall has something at the bottom of his strange behavior in this matter more than appears upon the surface."

"He pretends to acquiesce himself in my views, and yet got hold of Bert Rosser and his gang and they are a wild lot as you know."

"One of the gang owes much to me, and as he could not help riding with the others, he sent me a note that Bert and his Sixes, as they are called, are going to ambush the trail between this ranch and Fort Crag, and hold you up Arizona Charlie, and rescue your prisoner."

"Forewarned, Captain Stanley is forearmed," said Arizona Charlie, with no show of excitement at what he had heard.

"Yes, but I have decided upon a plan to thwart Bert Rosser and his Sixes."

"Yes, sir."

"We can leave here now and go to my ranch and stop to-night, and to-morrow Mr. Meadows, you can take Joslyn to Antelope

Post instead of to Crag, for one will serve your purpose just as well as the other, and that will be near for Diamond Dick to come and identify your prisoner."

"True, sir, and we will avoid this ambush, which I will be glad to do, as I do not care to have to kill Mr. Joslyn, especially after what I have heard to-day."

"To kill me?" said Jack Joslyn, in surprise.

"Yes, sir, for if I took you along the trail to Crag, I would carry my revolver ready at the first word of 'hands up!' to place the muzzle against your heart, and if your rescuers insisted upon having you they should get your dead body only, if they killed me as I drew trigger on you."

There was something so calm and determined in the manner in which Charlie Meadows said this, that both Captain Stanley and Jack Joslyn did not doubt for an instant but that he would do just as he said he would.

"Well, Meadows, I have given you warning of what you may expect, so you are the one to say which trail you will take with your prisoner."

"As I said, Captain Stanley, I will take the trail to Antelope Post, though I have my camping outfit and provisions, so need not trouble your family by stopping there."

"Ah, yes, I shall insist that you do stop at my ranch, for if those fellows get an idea of the change of destination, they will not dare attack my ranch, and I will send to Cross Trails City for men to come and hunt down Bert Rosser and his Sixes as outlaws."

"No, you go with me."

"As you wish it, sir, I yield, for I am far from desiring trouble, and there is nothing to gain by it but the death of a few of us who do not care to shuffle off this mortal coil yet awhile."

"I agree with you, Meadows."

"And permit me to add, Mr. Meadows, that I certainly desire you to go by the trail that we will have no trouble on."

"I do not care to be shot by you, to protect yourself, any more than I care to be hanged for crimes I am guiltless of, so take the Antelope Post Trail by all means, though I confess to not wish to face Mrs. Stanley and Miss Viola, from shame at the charges against me."

"They know all, Joslyn, and I believe both have confidence in your innocence," and from the lips of the prisoner broke the words:

"Thank Heaven that they at least have faith in me!"

CHAPTER XXVIII.

IN DOUBT.

It having been decided to go on to the Stanley Ranch, Jack Joslyn suggested that one of the men be called to get supper for them before starting, as it would be nine o'clock before they reached their destination, for it was five hours' ride.

So a horn was blown by Joslyn, and one of the men on the prairie at once came at a gallop toward the ranch.

"Mr. Joslyn, will you give your word of honor, that you will make no attempt to escape, and cause no trouble, if I free your hands while your man is here?" asked Arizona Charlie.

"I will, sir."

Instantly Charley Meadows unlocked the handcuffs from the wrists of the prisoner, and when the cowboy came up Jack Joslyn said:

"Get us a nice supper, Barnes, and as quick as you can, for we have a long ride before us to-night."

"The fire is built and all ready for you."

"All right, cap'n I'll have it ready in half an hour," answered Barnes.

The three horses of the party were then given feed and water, after which Arizona Charlie said:

"Captain Stanley, I wish you to hear a story which Mr. Joslyn told me for he can have no reason for hiding it from you as I wish him to get all there is in his case that will help to clear him."

"I shall be glad to hear anything in your favor, Joslyn, for I confess that which I have heard I can hardly doubt."

"Will you tell the story, Mr. Joslyn, as you told it to me?" asked Charlie Meadows.

"I will."

"Come out of the hearing of Barnes," and he led the way to a rustic bench between some trees a short distance from the cabin.

Then he began his story, the same which he told Arizona Charlie, and Captain Stanley's face lighted up with pleasure as he saw a chance for the young ranchero to prove his innocence.

"May I ask if you have any wish to conceal your father's name from me, Joslyn, for you know I was also in the regular army?"

"My father's name, sir, I will give you both in confidence, for it is the same as my own, I having been named after him, only I have reversed it and taken off a part of it."

"His name was Joslyn Jackson then, major of the —th Cavalry," quickly said Captain Stanley.

"Yes, sir, Major Joslyn Jackson, which I changed to Jack Joslyn."

"I know your father slightly, and am aware that he had twin sons, one of whom I heard had gone to the bad."

"By Heaven, Joslyn, I hope you can prove your innocence of this accusation against you, for I dislike to lose my confidence in human nature, as I would if you were as black as you are painted," and the captain spoke with enthusiasm.

"It certainly is in Mr. Joslyn's favor, Captain Stanley, that you knew his father, and he had a twin brother," Charlie Meadows remarked, and he was glad to feel that Joslyn could clear himself, as he liked him from what he had seen of him.

But, assuming a serious tone again, Captain Stanley said:

"But, Joslyn, there is one thing which you have not cleared up."

"What is that, sir?"

"How you can do so I am at a loss to know, after what I have heard."

"Say what it is, captain, and give me the chance, please."

"Well, what about your having plotted with Doc Daly to attack your ranch, or rather make a sham attack upon it, and the death of your uncle?"

"That looks bad for you, Mr. Joslyn," said Charlie Meadows.

After a slight hesitation the answer came.

"You heard that of course, sir, from Doc Daly, and he belonged to my brother's band of Mounted Miners."

"My brother organized that attack upon the ranch, hoping to kill my uncle and myself, for he knew that his shot had not proven fatal, as he had supposed and hoped it had."

"He got three Indians to aid him, along with Doc Daly, Buck Benson and others, and I beat them off, though my uncle was killed and I was wounded."

"Well?"

"The three Indians pushed forward and got killed, and the others departed foiled."

"And Doc Daly's story is false?"

"Of course."

"He knew me by sight, I suppose, and my brother told him of our relationship."

"When I foiled him in his efforts to kidnap your daughter, and killed his pard Benson, he saw his chance to ruin me, and hence his story that I was Muerte, that I had killed my uncle, and was wounded by accident."

"Well, Joslyn, I confess that I doubt his story now, after having heard yours."

"What do you say, Arizona Charlie?"

"I also am in doubt, sir, of the guilt of Mr. Joslyn," was the answer.

CHAPTER XXIX.

TRUSTING THE ACCUSED.

BARNES the cowboy soon had supper ready, and a good one it was too of beef-steaks, eggs, roasted potatoes, coffee and biscuit.

The horses were rested and had had a good meal, and the party mounted for their ride while the sun was yet nearly an hour above the horizon of mountains in the distance.

The captain set the pace and it was in a running lope, which those western horses can keep untiringly for hours.

Captain Stanley led, then came Jack Joslyn, not in irons and not armed, for Arizona Charlie had not the heart to put the handcuffs again upon him.

In the rear came the scout, and thus they held on their way.

It was a ride of twenty-five miles, but the trail was an easy one, and Captain Stanley held on at the same pace even after night came on.

The miles were thus cast rapidly behind them, and just at eight o'clock a light appeared across the prairie.

"That is my ranch, Meadows," said the captain, and, as the horses would soon have rest and feed they were urged on.

It was not nine o'clock when at last the party drew rein at the stockade fence and dismounted, while the captain gave his well known call to announce his arrival and bring the man out to look after the horses.

Turning to the prisoner Captain Joslyn said:

"They of course must know, Joslyn, that you are a prisoner, but I wish the liberty of telling your story, that my wife and daughter may understand your prospects of clearing up the clouds now upon you."

"It would be better so, I think; but remember, Mr. Joslyn, I still hold you to your word of honor to make no effort to escape," said Charlie Meadows.

"I have given it a good faith, Mr. Meadows, and shall hold my pledge sacred, believe me."

"I will, sir."

"And captain, tell Mrs. Stanley and Miss Viola what you deem best that may be in my favor, for I do not wish to be thought by them the wretch I am accused of being," and Jack Joslyn's voice quivered with emotion.

"I hope that it will all come right in the end— Ah! here is my man, so come in," and the captain led the way to the cabin, the door of which had been opened by Viola, who stood awaiting their approach.

She had recognized her father's call, and not expecting him, as he had said he would not return home that night, was glad of his coming, for she was anxious to know if there was further news of the happenings of the day.

Mrs. Stanley also was desirous to know what had caused her husband to change his mind, and both mother and daughter were uneasy in their own hearts, yet anxious to hide any uneasiness they might feel from each other.

Hearing voices, Viola supposed that her father was talking to the ranchman who did the chores about the place, when suddenly she saw three persons approaching the cabin.

Instantly she stepped back out of the door, and the next moment the captain entered, followed by Jack Joslyn and Arizona Charlie.

"Well, wife, I came back home after all, for we thought it best, as some of the young hot-heads of Cross Trails City intended ambushing Mr. Meadows to-morrow and trying to rescue Mr. Joslyn."

"You see, I have brought both with me, and we are going to give Mr. Joslyn the benefit of the doubt until he is proven guilty, so look upon him as an innocent man while he is our guest."

"I am glad to hear you say this, husband, for I cannot bring myself to believe you the wicked man they accuse you of being, Mr. Joslyn," and Mrs. Stanley extended her hand to Jack Joslyn, who said in a low tone:

"You are most kind to me, my dear madam."

"Nor do I believe you guilty, Jack," and Viola also grasped his hand, while he replied:

"It would be going different from your teachings, Miss Viola, if I was so wicked."

In spite of the guests saying that they did not wish any supper, Mrs. Stanley said that their long ride had surely given them an appetite, and they must surely have something to eat, and soon a very tempting meal was set before them, which caused even the captain to belie his words that he was not hungry.

Expecting to make an early start in the morning with his prisoner for Antelope Post, Captain Stanley suggested retiring soon after supper, and with perfect confidence now in

their prisoner, they allowed him to retire alone to one of the wing-rooms which was on each side of the main building, and connected alone by the surrounding piazza.

CHAPTER XXX.

A FAIR TEMPTRESS.

AT Captain Stanley's wish, Jack Joslyn had told both Mrs. Stanley and Viola the secret he had made known to them about his early life and misfortunes, brought on by the action of his twin-brother, Jerrold.

He had told the story in a way that carried conviction with it, and the more convinced Arizona Charlie and the captain that they were wrong in believing him to be guilty, but that he had suffered through his striking resemblance to his brother.

"It will all come right in the end, Jack," the captain had said in a kindly way, and Arizona Charlie had also bidden him good-night with a friendly word of hope.

"You have stayed all night with us before, Joslyn, so take your old quarters in the left wing, and Mr. Meadows, I will show you your room," the captain said.

So the party broke up for the night, Arizona, being shown to the right-wing room, quarters that were most inviting indeed to a plainsman.

The prisoner meanwhile had said good-night, and crossing the piazza, found the door of his room open and a light there.

Upon the candlestick he found a piece of paper, which he took up, opened and read.

A strange light came into his face as he read it over and over again, and which was as follows:

"JACK:—Both my father and Officer Meadows are generous to trust you as they do and you have given your word of honor not to escape."

"But let me say to you that as a prisoner you can hardly prove your innocence; you can not find your brother and give evidence of his existence, and military law is severe and merciless."

"No sentiment will be taken into consideration where men believe they have in their power a wretch, that wicked outlaw chief, and you may not get justice at the hands of those who are to decide your case."

"Once free, you can get proof, and with it you can come back and defy your accusers."

"For these reasons I urge you, tempt you to fly."

"You know the country well, and you must take my splendid horse, Runaway, for he has wonderful speed and endurance."

"I will rap at your window when all is quiet, and you leave your room through it, and I will have your weapons ready for you and lead you to your horse."

"I will also have food and two canteens of water for you, enough to last you a week or more."

"I write in haste to tell you that my desire is for you to fly to-night and return when you can prove that your wicked brother, not you, is the one they must track down."

It was no wonder that Jack Joslyn read this hastily penciled note again and again, and that it brought a strange expression to his face.

Did it not show that Viola Stanley loved him?

He so read between the lines.

Did it not show that she dreaded for him to risk himself before those who would have to be his judges, and that she wished him, guilty or not guilty though he might be, to make his escape?

He so saw it all, and folding the letter he placed it in his pocket.

Then he put out the light, after pocketing the matches he found in the room, thrust the candle also in his pocket and locking the door sat down by the rear window to wait.

His actions showed that he had decided to take Viola's advice, even if his muttered words had not.

"She but anticipated my intention."

"Yes, free I am safe."

He had not very long to wait before there came a tap at the window.

Instantly he opened the heavy shutter, for the window was already up, and there in the starlight stood Viola, carrying a heavy load upon her shoulders.

"Come, Jack," she said in a whisper.

He leaped from the window to the ground, and took the burden she carried, which was a roll of blankets wrapped in canvas and tightly strapped.

"I brought this camping outfit for you, for you will go, will you not?" she said pleadingly.

"Yes, I will go, Miss Viola."

"Then follow me."

She led the way off to the stockade fence, close alongside of it to the stables, and

through a heavy gate that opened upon the prairie.

Outside was hitched the horse, and upon him was his own saddle and bridle.

To the saddle-horse hung a lariat, his belt of arms, a canvas bag full of provisions, and two canteens.

He threw the blanket roll behind the saddle and strapped it securely.

Then he put his canvas provision bag upon one side, the canteen upon the other and buckled about his waist his belt of arms, slinging his rifle at his back.

"I am ready, Miss Viola, and I owe you more than I can express to you."

"Do not speak of that, but go—good-by," and grasping his hand she was gone, while he, after watching her departure an instant, mounted and rode away across the prairie.

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE DISCOVERY.

It was just growing light when Captain Stanley was called by his man and told to get up.

"All right, Carter, wake the two gentlemen," said the captain.

Carter soon returned and called out:

"One of them is up, sir, but I cannot make the other answer my knock, and his door is locked."

The captain was nearly dressed and he turned and looked at his wife.

She in turn looked at him.

In the minds of each flashed the same thought:

"Has he broken his pledge and escaped?"

"All right, Carter, I will go myself," said the captain, and a minute after he was knocking at the door of the room occupied by Jack Joslyn.

But no response came to his knocks.

The captain went around to one window, then another, and found the blind of the rear one could be pulled open.

The sash was up, and he at once went after Arizona Charlie.

He found Charlie Meadows just coming out of his room.

"Meadows!"

"Yes, sir."

"Come with me to Joslyn's room."

They went to the rear window, and, nimble as a cat, Charlie Meadows leaped into the room.

It was good daylight now, and the answer to the captain's question as to whether the prisoner was there came very coolly:

"No, sir; he has gone."

"You are sure?"

"Well, sir, I'll open the door, and you will see that his bed was not occupied."

The captain was in the room in another minute, and beheld for himself that the prisoner had flown.

"He has broken his parole, Meadows."

"Yes, sir."

"That looks bad."

"It looks as though he was afraid to take the chances of proving his innocence, or thought he had better escape, as he was guilty."

"It certainly looks so; but he cannot be far away, on foot, as he has gone."

"He has not gone on foot, sir."

"He could not get a horse from the stables for the keys are brought into the house every night, and the herd of ponies are off in the corral where my cowboys have their cabin."

"If he has gone on foot it will be hard to track him, sir, but if he has ridden away I can pick up his trail and follow him."

"I fear you will never catch him now, Arizona Charlie."

"Captain Stanley, I trusted that man, and I tell you I shall track him to the end of his trail, for I am not one to give it up once I start upon it," and there was a determination in the voice and looks of Charlie Meadows which showed that he meant what he said.

"Well, my wife and daughter must know how Joslyn has deceived us, so come in as breakfast is nearly ready."

"Let us first see how he left, sir, and I will order my horse, if you please."

"There comes Carter now," and Carter came up with the information that Miss Viola's horse Runaway had been taken from the stable, though the keys had been in the house all night, and that Mr. Joslyn's saddle and bridle were not where they had been placed last night.

The captain and Charlie Meadows looked at each other significantly and went out to the stables.

It was just as Carter had said, the best horse on the ranch had been taken. Joslyn's saddle and bridle were gone and the trail of the animal led out of the stable yard gate, which was also doubly locked at night.

Then the two returned to the cabin after Arizona Charlie had ordered his horse around as soon as breakfast was over.

"Yes, and my horse, too," Carter called out the captain.

Mrs. Stanley was in the dining room when they entered and heard the news with a face filled with surprise while she said:

"This is a strange move for Jack Joslyn when he said he was innocent."

Then the captain discovered that the weapons, the belt of arms and repeating rifle of Joslyn had been taken from the sitting room.

"This is astounding, for I left them there myself, and this part of the house I securely locked, for see there is the sitting-room, here the dining room, and next is Viola's room, and there our own, and all were locked."

"I cannot understand this at all."

Just then Viola's door opened and she appeared.

She was very pale but said in a voice that was firm and distinct:

"Permit me to explain, father, for I urged Mr. Joslyn to escape and aided him to do so."

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE PURSUIT.

THE startling acknowledgment of Viola, that she had urged the escape of Jack Joslyn, and aided him, caused Captain Stanley to turn pale with dread, while Mrs. Stanley was almost stunned by the shock.

As for Arizona Charlie he simply smiled and was silent, for he had felt all along that the prisoner had been aided in his escape and for some reason suspicion had fallen upon Viola in his mind.

One quick glance into the face of Charlie Meadows, which Viola gave, assured her that he knew that she was the culprit even before she had confessed it.

Seeing the effect upon her parents of her confession, Viola was frightened and hastily said:

"Father! mother! do not look so, for what great wrong have I done?"

"I like Jack, and did he not risk his life to save me take human life to prevent my capture by those men?"

"Should I not wish to return the favor, for I am not ungrateful?"

"I know what military law is and that it is merciless."

"Jack Joslyn is accused of being one whom any crowd of frontiersmen would ruthlessly string up on the suspicion alone that he was Muerte."

"He told us his story and I believe him; but he was being taken to Antelope Post, where stern old Colonel Marsden would hang him and try him afterward."

"A prisoner, he would have no chance to prove his innocence but free he could do so."

"A prisoner he would be sacrificed, while with his freedom he could go and find the guilty ones and all would be well for him."

"I do not blame Mr. Meadows, for he is doing his duty and I beg him to pardon me for plotting against him and setting his prisoner free."

"I simply told Jack to go and find the brother who has brought this wrong upon him, and I aided him to do so."

"Pursuit will be useless, for he is mounted upon my matchless horse Runaway, has his arms, a camping outfit and provisions, so do not attempt to capture him, as it will be of no avail even for you, Arizona Charlie."

Viola had spoken earnestly and convincingly in her own behalf, but when she alluded to Arizona Charlie he smiled and said:

"You are forgiven, Miss Stanley. I assure you, and under the circumstances I do not censure you."

"I never blame a woman for anything, for when they do not know themselves, how can we poor men expect to understand them? But joking aside, you have put me upon my mettle, when you say that it will be of no

avail for even you, Arizona Charlie, to pursue the fugitive prisoner."

"My duty is to retake him, and a desire to treat him well alone allowed me to be merciful to him and remove his handcuffs."

"I should have kept him in irons, but then I am not one to repine over what could not be helped, and again I say I gladly forgive you and I hope you will forgive me if I recapture him."

"Gladly, for I know I can say so, as it will be impossible as I said for even you to do so."

"Well, Arizona Charlie, the fellow is gone, and he broke his pledged word of honor in doing as he did, and that leads me to doubt him, though he was sorely tempted, I admit."

"Do not mind it, wife, and Meadows, you must not let it destroy your appetite, so sit down and have breakfast," and the captain spoke with cheerfulness, though his manner was assumed, for he bitterly felt the act of Viola in setting the prisoner free, and it came upon his heart with great sorrow that she really loved the accused man.

Arizona Charlie enjoyed his breakfast, and afterward bade Mrs. Stanley and Viola good by as though nothing had occurred to mar his visit to the ranch.

Barnes had his horse in fine trim and Mrs. Stanley had added to his outfit a bag of provisions.

The captain was anxious to leave Viola alone with her mother, and so said he would go with Arizona Charlie, for the day, at least.

So they mounted, and Charlie Meadows at once picked up the tracks of the runaway as he left the ranch, and followed the trail across the prairie unerringly.

He might be hours behind the fugitive, but he was not one to be thrown off the track in pursuit of one whom he was now determined to recapture.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

UNDERHAND WORK.

IT was true that Nate Hall had been at the bottom of the intention to rescue Jack Joslyn from Arizona Charlie, for when he saw that the settlers, at the gathering after church, yielded to the argument of Captain Stanley, he went up to Bert Rosser and told him to come to the lock up with his men and help him bury Benson the outlaw.

"I want only you and your Sixes, Bert, and I'll have the team and tools ready," he said.

Going to the store he got out Keep's ambulance, gathered some spades and shovels, and when Bert Rosser arrived was ready to put the body into the wagon.

The men then came up, who were known as Bert Rosser's Sixes, and the party started for the burying-ground out upon the prairie a mile.

Several others would have gone along, but Rosser flatly told them they were not wanted.

Arriving at the burying ground, the party went to one corner where what was known as the "Outs" were buried.

The "Outs" were those who were desperadoes who had been hanged or were killed for horse stealing and other crimes.

The other part of the burying ground, which in its earlier years had gained the name of "The Angels' Trail" was devoted to the bodies of those who died among the settlers.

This was sheltered by trees and flowers, and a few rude stones and wooden headboards were visible there, while the graves of the Outs were simply marked by a plain, unpainted board, upon which was painted in red letters the story of the departed after this fashion:

"BEN SLAUGHTER.

HANGED FOR CATTLE STEALING.

Other Thieves Look Out."

"BBICKTOP BILL.

Christian Name Unknown.

CHEATED THE WRONG MAN AT CARDS.

Card-Sharps be Warned."

"SASSY SAM.

DESPERADO AND HORSE-THIEF.

Took one horse too many, and got his neck

tangled in the stake-r. pe."

Such short histories on a headboard had a moral, and served as warnings to others who might feel inclined to go astray in the vicinity of Cross Trails City, should they first visit "The Angels' Trail" cemetery and read the inscriptions on the headboards there in the corner of the "Outs."

Under the direction of Nate Hall a grave was soon dug, and the body, wrapped in the blankets which had kept him warm in life, was placed in it without any word of ceremony.

The grave was then filled in and Nate Hall, in lieu of a personal discourse, made a speech.

It was as follows:

"Pards, you have just planted one who was killed in his deviltry by one of the whitest men in these parts—Jack Joslyn."

"We started to hang the dead man's pard, when a chap chipped in and stood us off until Captain Stanley came and broke up the game, for we must not break the law."

"But that fellow who escaped the noose, in revenge against Jack Joslyn, told lies on him, and the result is that he is now a prisoner and on his way to Fort Crag, where they'll hang him before he can get proof that he is not guilty of the charges against him."

"Now, I'm a church member, as you know, have a class of girls in the Sunday-school, and keeper of the town jail, and hold a high position in Keep's store, so it won't do for me to set a bad example; but you Bert Rosser, you and your Sixes, have been well treated by Jack Joslyn and by me."

"Jack is a square man, and he is my friend, and I don't want to see him hanged like a dog, nor do you."

"That fellow Arizona Charlie is a good one and it won't do to get into trouble with him, for he is a bad man in a fight, as you have all heard, and a special officer; but you can go ahead on the trail to Crag to-night, lie in ambush at Blue Water Spring, and hold him up and set Jack Joslyn free."

"That nobody may know you, just wear masks, and once Jack is free, let Arizona Charlie be tied to his horse, the animal hitched there, and so left until the mail rider comes along twenty four hours after, in which time you can all cover up your tracks and our pard escape."

"I know you boys are not rich, and can't work for nothing, so when the work is done I'll give you, Bert, fifty dollars apiece for your boys, and you a hundred."

"What do you say, boys?"

They were more than happy at the chance, and any one passing near and hearing them, would have thought from their being in the burying ground that they were sending a dead comrade off on the long trail with a cheer.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

ON THE TRAIL.

CAPTAIN STANLEY had men in the settlement who had their eyes and ears open to serve him in any way, and so he was posted by several persons that something was going on that looked suspicious.

The doctor had passed the burying-ground, and unseen by those there had discovered Nate Hall and the others, and this seemed to indicate that all was not well.

Later a settler had seen Nate Hall let Bert Rosser into the store, and the latter had left with a good supply of things in a couple of bags.

This was all wrong, for the store was never opened on Sundays.

The "Sixes" too, had been discovered together, getting their horses and traps in readiness as though to take the trail, and as Captain Stanley had all this reported to him, and knew that they were the ones who had sought to rescue the young ranchero from Arizona Charlie, he decided to go to the ranch, as has been seen, for he was certain that the attempt would be made the next day, and presumably at the best spot on the trail for an ambush, the Blue Water Spring.

That he started Arizona Charlie and his prisoner in the other direction, and with the result of a rescue by Viola, is known to the reader.

When Captain Stanley went away from his ranch with Charlie Meadows, he found the trail of the fugitive prisoner leading toward his own ranch.

This told them that he was going to his home, perhaps to boldly make a stand there and defy re-arrest.

So they pushed rapidly on, and not sparing their horses, reached Joslyn Ranch just four hours after leaving the captain's home.

They had followed the trail all the way and saw that the fugitive had taken advantage of his knowledge of the country to cut every mile off the trail that he could.

It was yet a couple of hours before noon when they rode up to the cowboys who were on the prairie with the cattle.

The captain acted as spokesman and said:

"Is Jack at home?"

"No, sir."

"He's been home, has he not?"

"Yes, cap'n, he came home in the night, shortly after one o'clock, and said he were going on a trail to Antelope Post, so, he rigged out a extra riding-horse, the best he had, and a pack-animal mighty nigh as good, and left about one o'clock for Antelope."

"Did he leave no word with you?"

"No more'n that we was to keep things a running along same as usual, that thar had been a rumpus of some kind, but that all would be as he wanted it in the end."

"Did he take many things away with him on his pack-horse?" asked Arizona Charlie.

"Only a full campin' outfit as we seen, with an extra gun or two."

"And he took the trail for Antelope Post?"

"Yes, over yonder behind the mountain he went, for there is a cut-off there, though it's a dangerous one."

"He said he had business with the colonel at Antelope," said the cowboy.

"All right, boys, I am much obliged," the captain remarked.

"Won't you gents go by and have a bite o' suthin' to eat?" asked one of the cowboys.

"No thank you, it is too early for nooning and we are in something of a hurry," answered the captain and he rode on with Charlie Meadows.

"Well, Arizona Charlie, do they know, or do they not, anything about Joslyn?"

"They do not, sir, for he is too shrewd a man to have allies on his own ranch."

"The coming and going of Joslyn last night is just as they report it, I think."

"But his going to Antelope?"

"That is a blind, sir."

"You don't think he is going there?"

"I do not, sir."

"Why did he tell them so?"

"It sounded as though he were going there to report the situation to Colonel Marsden and ask a parole from him to hunt down his brother, or at least, repeated to us, he expected we would so look at it."

"But you take no stock in that?"

"Not in the least, sir, for he knows that I would follow his trail."

"If he is Major Muerie he knows me well, Captain Stanley, and is aware that I will do all I can to hunt him down."

"So you follow his trail from here?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, I will go on toward Fort Crag and rout out those fellows who are lying in ambush, for I wish just that knowledge against him."

"I will post you by special messenger if necessary, to the address you gave me, if anything turns up, and you know where to find me if you need me."

"Thank you, sir," and with a grasp of the hand they parted.

CHAPTER XXXV.

IN AMBUSH.

BERT ROSSE and his Sixes left Cross Trails City in twos, and just after night-fall.

They met on the trail miles away from the settlement and rode on toward their place of ambush, which was to be the Blue Water Spring on the way to Fort Crag.

They were anxious to reach their position, and there they could camp for the night in some timber not far away, and at daylight take up their places among the rocks which surrounded the spring.

Blue Water Spring was a most delicious stream of water, and it was so deep that it

reflected the skies in its depths and looked exactly as though it was blue water indeed.

It was situated in a basin, surrounded by hills of rock, and formed an outlet through a split in one side of the hill.

Long had it been a camping place for Indians and pale-faces on the march, and many a man had gone there for a cool draught of the waters to meet his death from some foe lurking in ambush, until just over the rise among a clump of cedars, a dozen or more graves were to be seen.

Camping in the timber, when they arrived near the spring after midnight, Bert Rosser and his six comrades slept soundly until dawn, when, staking their horses out in the valley near, with one man as a guard, the others went, as soon as they had eaten breakfast, to go into ambush at the spring.

Bert Rosser placed his men well, for those approaching the spring would have to pass two of the men stationed among the rocks to cut off retreat.

Further on, upon either side of the spring, a man was stationed, and in front, cutting off flight ahead, he and another man took up their position.

Going on foot they left no trails, and the rocks completely concealed them, while they formed a circle around the spring of a quarter of an acre in size.

Their rifles were ready, and at a command they could cover Arizona Charlie and hold him at their mercy completely.

It was a well-arranged plot, and the ambush was perfect.

They did not expect the scout and his prisoner to come along until nearly noon, so they showed no impatience until the sun had passed the meridian a couple of hours.

Why he did not come then they could not understand, and they began to grow anxious, not so much from the fear that the prisoner might after all be hanged, as the dread of losing the money promised them for his rescue.

Had the cunning borderman, Arizona Charlie, suspected trouble, and so taken another trail?

That seemed to alarm them, though to go by another trail would carry him many long miles out of the way.

At last the hoof-falls of a horse were heard approaching, and Bert Rosser gave a word of warning.

Rifles were gotten ready, and all were at once upon the alert.

After several minutes of suspense, a horseman rode into view.

It was Captain Stanley.

He rode leisurely along toward the spring, apparently unconscious that there was any one else than himself nearer than the Joslyn Ranch.

He halted at the spring, dismounted, and taking his canteen, filled it with the icy-cold water, while his horse drank to his fill.

Then the captain sung a few notes, tightened his saddle-girths, and mounting, started on his way.

The men in ambush were as quiet as panthers watching for prey.

Captain Stanley was not the man they wanted.

In fact, Captain Stanley was the last man just then in the wide, wide world they wished to see.

They were so glad that he did not suspect their presence, and was going on his way.

Of course their game had escaped them, for Arizona Charlie had either gone back to Cross Trails City or had taken another trail to Fort Crag.

They were downfallen, mad clean through and disappointed; but they were glad to escape detection by a man they all feared, for Captain Stanley was a terror of evil-doers.

Suddenly, just as they were beginning to feel secure, Captain Stanley drew rein, and in the coolest manner possible, said:

"I say, Bert Rosser, you and your Sixes might as well break ambush, for Arizona Charlie and his prisoner are not coming this way."

The faces of the six men in ambush whitened.

They knew that their presence at the spring was known, and in an instant the result of this discovery flashed through the mind of Bert Rosser, and he knew that they would be severely dealt with by the settlers for what they had done.

Instantly then he decided to act for their own preservation, and so he shouted forth:

"Hands up, Captain Stanley, or you are a dead man!"

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE REFUSAL.

CAPTAIN STANLEY was a man of great nerve.

He saw that he had trusted too far the men whom he had expected to awe.

His intention had been to read them a lecture, and send them on their way with the information that he had his eye upon them.

That they would attempt to hold him up he never for an instant held such a thought.

But the truth was before him that they were hostile toward him.

To attempt to resist seven men, as he believed there were, in such an ambush, was, he knew, the very height of madness.

So he said calmly, in answer to the summons of Bert Rosser:

"Well, Rosser, if you mean to hold me up, I can but obey your command."

"Now, what is your pleasure?"

"Hands up, sir!"

"All right, up they go."

"What now?"

The captain raised his hands above his head and not liking the work himself Bert Rosser ordered one of his men to go and disarm him.

The man obeyed, then the band surrounded the captain, his hands were tied behind his back, and his feet under his horse, while his weapons were then made fast to his saddle-horse.

"There will come a time of reckoning for this work, Rosser."

"Well, captain, you came here to entrap us, and had you been allowed to have your way the settlers would have driven us out of the community like wild beasts, just because we wished to save a good fellow from being carried off to be hanged by Arizona Charlie."

"He was charged with being an outlaw, and had he proven his innocence no more would have been asked."

"Where is he now?"

"Safe from any attempt at rescue by you."

"How did you know we were here?"

"I had news of it."

"And so sent our friend in another direction, while you came on here to laugh at us."

"About that, Rosser."

"Well, its our turn to laugh now."

"He laughs best who laughs last, Rosser."

"Well, I am willing to make terms with you."

"I am not making any terms with you, however."

"Why?"

"Well, you went against the law in coming here, you intended to rescue a man from a Government officer, whom you would have killed, had he resisted, which he certainly would have done, and now you hold me up, a justice of the peace and constable of this settlement."

"Do you think I would make terms with men who thus outlaw themselves?"

"Maybe you will have to."

"You do not know me, I see, Bert Rosser."

"And you don't know me, Captain Stanley."

"Well, what is your intention?"

"Will you take your solemn oath, if we set you free, that you will not report on us, and allow no one to know of this affair?"

"I will not."

"If you will, I will set you free and there it will end."

"No, I refuse, for I would not live in a settlement where I am cowed by half a dozen men of your stripe," was the plucky response.

"Then we shall not set you free."

"You know best how far to go."

"We will take you to the river and let you drown there with your horse, for we can fix it up so as to look like an accident."

"I have no doubt you can fix up any kind of deviltry you wish, Bert Rosser, but I cannot believe that you will dare to take my life."

"You don't know us."
 "Well, I have had a suspicion that at least you were a gang of desperadoes."
 "Well, take the oath we demand and we will let you go."
 "I refuse."
 "Then you will simply commit suicide."
 "So be it; Arizona Charlie knows that I was coming here, and when I do not turn up he will take your trail and I will be avenged."
 "But you will be dead then."
 "And you will not be long following me out of life, mark my words."
 "Again I ask, will you take the oath we demand of you?"
 "I will not."
 "Then argument ceases, so come, boys, we'll go to camp and then strike the trail for the river, where the captain will meet with a fatal accident in crossing."
 "We must protect ourselves, boys, and seven lives are more valuable than one," and Bert Rosser led the way to the camp, he leading the horse of Captain Stanley himself.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

A BUGLE CALL.

IF Captain Stanley really believed that the men who held him captive intended to carry out their threat he certainly showed remarkable nerve, for not the slightest sign of dread crossed his face.

He really had every reason for believing that they would do so, for his death could be made to look like an accident and they would be safe, while, if he was allowed to return to the settlement they would no longer be permitted to dwell there, after he told his story, and it might be that the angry settlers would make short work of them all, for Vigilantes on the border act without mercy very often when they feel that the safety of a community demands it.

The man left in the camp, expecting the return of the party, had cooked dinner, and all ate heartily, for Nate Hall had provided well for them.

The captain's appetite never faltered under his danger and his hands were freed to allow him to partake of his food, as Bert Rosser said:

"We don't wish to send you off on the last trail, cap'n, on an empty stomach."

"Thank you," and Captain Stanley went on with his dinner apparently not in the least disturbed.

The meal being finished the party mounted their horses, and rode away with their prisoner toward the swiftly-flowing river, some dozen miles away, running along through a narrow valley.

It was upon the trail to Fort Crag, from Cross Trails City, and had to be forded in going to and from each place.

The captors of the captain were now determined to carry out their threat, for his death meant their safety, and they felt that they could arrange it so that it would appear like an accidental drowning, from his horse giving out in the ford.

They would give him one more chance for his life, and if he refused then they would act.

That he would refuse to take the oath demanded of him they felt assured, so they looked upon his death as a certainty and Bert Rosser said:

"We will do as we said, cap'n, so you might as well be reciting over your prayers as you ride along, for it is not far to the river."

Captain Stanley made no reply, but cast a quick glance at the river, now visible just winding out of the valley.

As they went along the trail, as it wound into the valley Bert Rosser said:

"The ford's only a mile away, cap'n."

Still no reply, and the party rode on.

At last the ford was reached, and just there another trail came into the one they had traveled, coming down the ridge of hills, and leading from the plains beyond.

The party halted upon the river-bank near the ford, and Captain Stanley's horse was hitched to a tree, while the men led their animals to one side and staked them out.

Then they returned toward the captain, after halting apart for a talk together, and which was an urgent one.

The eyes of the captain were upon them,

and he saw that one or more of the party seemed to be urging against the carrying out of Bert Rosser's threat to put him to death. He knew that he was in the hands of desperate men, and he felt that they would carry out their intention.

If he yielded to their demand, and took a solemn oath not to betray them, he could save his life, yet for how long, for would they not stand in deadly fear of him and some one of them watch his chance to put him out of the way?

Life was dear to him, and yet his was a nature that would not stand driving.

He would watch his chance, and if he had to die, then he would fight to the end and some of the band, Bert Rosser himself would have to accompany him, for he knew the intention was to lead him to a cliff some thirty feet in height and throw him into the river, held by a lariat and bound.

He found that he could release his hands, when the time came, by slipping them out of the bands, and this he would do and fight for his life.

Just as the party approached him, Ben Rosser having silenced every opposition, then suddenly rung out from among the hills on the trail across the river, the clear notes of a bugle sounding a charge, and following it came the loud command:

"Follow me, men, and wipe out that gang of cut-throats!"

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

MAJOR BALDWIN'S VISITOR.

MAJOR FRANK BALDWIN, the commandant of Fort Crag, was seated in his quarters enjoying his after-dinner cigar, when his orderly announced a visitor to see him.

The major was a gallant soldier, and had won favor upon the border.

A handsome man, with piercing eyes and a determined face, he yet had a kindly expression that showed him to be one to win friendship as well as admiration.

"Who is he, orderly?" asked Major Baldwin.

"I do not know, sir."

"He just arrived in the fort, sir, and gave no name."

"Show him in, orderly."

A moment after, Major Baldwin saw enter his quarters a man of striking presence.

He was a young man, and beardless with features that were regular, almost effeminate in their cast, yet withal a look of fearlessness and determination was stamped upon them, that showed a magnificent nerve to do and dare any danger.

His eyes were dark blue, and exceedingly bright, his hair almost of a golden hue and worn very long, almost falling down his back to his waist, and he removed a silver-embroidered sombrero, as he entered the major's quarters.

Over six feet in height, of slender but sinewy form, he stood as erect as a soldier on parade as he halted before Major Baldwin, who could not but be impressed with his striking appearance.

He was dressed in a suit of dark blue broadcloth, the coat buttoned up in a military style, the pants stuck in handsome cavalry boots coming up to the knee and with massive spurs adorning the heels.

A cloak of the same material was worn in a negligé manner, but removed upon entering Headquarters, as were also a pair of gauntlet gloves.

In his back silk scarf was a large and brilliant diamond, and its match was visible upon the little finger of his left hand, while the buckle of his belt of arms looked like solid gold.

As he raised his hand to salute the major there was a flash of light revealing that he wore diamond cuff-buttons in his gray silk shirt.

"Major Baldwin, you do not recognize me, I see?" he said in a voice of rich tone, and a smile that was most expressive.

"Ah! have we met before then?" asked the major and he added:

"Be seated, sir, and tell me where, for I confess my inability to recall when and where?" and the major spoke politely while he in vain studied the face before him.

"It was years ago, sir, when I was known as the Boy Hermit, and killed the outlaw known as the Mad Dragoon."

Instantly Major Baldwin was upon his

feet and grasping the hand of the young man said in his hearty way:

"My dear fellow, I am delighted to see you indeed."

"Yes, that was seven or eight years ago, and then you were a youth in your early teens."

"I recall you now, and the good service you rendered to the settlers of Garden Valley, by killing the Mad Dragoon and helping us to rid the country of his Indian raiders."

"Let me see, your name is McClellan, is it not?"

"Yes, sir, George B. McClellan, but the old hermit who reared me called me Dick, and I am now known as Diamond Dick."

"Indeed!"

"I have heard of you under that name too, for you were with Arizona Charlie in his hunt some years ago after the Mounted Miners and their chief Muerte?"

"Yes, sir."

"And so my Boy Hermit of years ago, is Diamond Dick, eh?"

"Well, I recall now that you find some diamonds among the canyons, and I heard too that they proved to be of considerable value."

"Yes, sir, the old hermit found them, and I also picked up a few, and they gave me quite a little fortune when I had them cut."

"Yes, and you gave some of them to Bessie Bond, whom then called Broncho Bessie, and who became the wife of Lieutenant George Everhart of my regiment."

"They are now East."

"Yes, sir, I have not seen my pretty little frontier pard, Broncho Bessie, since those old days; but I came here, Major Baldwin, to get upon the trail of my old friend Arizona Charlie, that is Charles H. Meadows, sir."

"He is not at this post, you know, being on special duty elsewhere."

"But you can reach him by going to the Tonto Basin where he has a ranch."

"Thank you, sir, I will go there to seek him."

"But you'll stop here for a few days' rest, Diamond Dick, as my guest, and we'll have some long talks over old times?"

"Thank you, Major Baldwin, but I am anxious to find Arizona Charlie, as, to tell you a secret sir, Major Muerte, the outlaw chief of the Mounted Miners, is not dead as we both supposed, but is living, I have heard from undoubted authority, in the vicinity of the settlement of Cross Trails City, he having turned ranchero."

"This is indeed surprising news, Diamond Dick," said Major Baldwin, and he added:

"If it be true."

CHAPTER XXXIX.

INDIFFERENT TO ODDS.

"THE story is true, Major Baldwin, for, as I told you, my authority is to be relied upon."

"I have heard of no one answering to the description of a man who could be taken for Muerte, dwelling about Cross Trails City," said Major Baldwin.

"You know, sir, that Major Muerte was always masked, it was said, his own men never seeing his face."

"Yes, but such a man must needs in some way reveal his character when dwelling in a settlement where vice and outlawry are not common?"

"He might not, sir."

"There is, besides, a gentleman living near Cross Trails City who was an ex-army officer, and I know him well."

"His name is Stanley, and he was among the first settlers, is justice of the peace and constable, and I feel that he would have reported to me any desperate character in that neighborhood."

"But, major, it is said that Muerte had taken an assumed name, has turned honest, has a ranch and is a respected member of society."

"Can it be possible that it is so, Diamond Dick?"

"Well, sir, it is what I have come to find out."

"I see, you know him?"

"I caught a sport cheating an army officer at cards once in a border saloon, and I accused him of it."

"He resented it with his revolver, and I hit him in the forehead, and he was laid to one side as a candidate for burial."

"But the bullet glanced on his skull, only stunning him, and he slipped away when he returned to consciousness.

"Some time after I was captured by Muerte and his band, and in the chief I recognized the man I had had the duel with.

"He meant to hang me, but I escaped by the aid of one of his band."

"So you do know him?"

"Yes, sir, and as he bears my brand, left by my bullet, I cannot fail to recognize him."

"Very true; but why do you seek Arizona Charlie to aid in his capture, when I can give you all the men you need?"

"Well, sir, it was Charlie who got me to join him upon the hunt for Muerte and his band, and I wish him to be in at the closing scene with me.

"I know Arizona Charlie, sir, his worth, his noble nature, pluck and skill, and he is a man that has few equals that I have ever met.

"If the man I suspect is Muerte, then the cowboys on his ranch must be his old comrades who escaped with him, and that will mean war, and Arizona Charlie and I may need each other's aid."

"Yes, and I will lend you all the aid you may desire from me, Diamond Dick."

"Thank you, Major Baldwin, and we may have to ask it of you."

"Do so, for I am ready."

"To-morrow, sir, I shall go on Arizona Charlie's trail, and then we will return and look up our man."

"Well, you will be my guest for the night, at least," and not accepting any declination, Major Baldwin ordered dinner set for Diamond Dick, and until late in the night the two talked over old times, when the rover frontiersman had been known as the Boy Hermit.

After breakfast the next morning Diamond Dick's horses were led out, one serving as a pack-animal.

They were splendid horses, both of them, and Diamond Dick's saddle and bridle had won the admiration of all at the fort, for they were of the Mexican pattern, mounted with silver and of great value.

Tying his cloak behind his saddle, Diamond Dick mounted, and with a military salute to the major, rode away, all who saw him being struck with his magnificent appearance, and wondering how he dared carry a small fortune in diamonds about the wild frontier with him.

"It shows wonderful self-confidence in him," the adjutant said to Major Baldwin, who responded:

"Yes; he was a mystery to me as a boy, and is more of a mystery now than ever.

"Once he lived among the Indians, was adopted by an old renegade white man they called a hermit, and avenged his death most thoroughly.

"He rendered us good service, and then departed upon his way.

"Now he is a rover of the plains, going where it suits his fancy, and yet ready to risk his life whenever he can be of service.

"Before long, adjutant, I predict we shall again hear of him."

Upon leaving the fort Diamond Dick took the trail for Cross Trails City.

He was nearing the river at the ford, when he suddenly spied a party of horsemen upon the other shore.

Watching them, he discovered that one was a prisoner, the others evidently intending to put him to death.

"I must rescue him," he said, and without counting the odds against him, he raised to his lips a small silver bugle he carried hung to his saddle, and loud and clear rung the notes through the hills.

A moment after he was dashing into the ford, his pack-horse closely following.

CHAPTER XL.

DIAMOND DICK TO THE RESCUE.

THE men about Captain Stanley heard the notes of the bugle, heard the loud command, caught sight of the tall form of Diamond Dick, his long hair floating in the breeze, and felt that he was a scout in advance and soldiers were following him.

To run to Captain Stanley, untie his horse, and lead him with them, would be to risk much, for a horse will not always be led at a rapid pace.

Their horses were in the direction they wished to go, and they wanted every second of time to effect their own escape.

So Bert Rosser set the example of flight, and there was no need for him to encourage his comrades by a call to them to follow him.

They were with him to a man in his flight, and as quickly as they could they dragged up their stake-pins, threw themselves into their saddles, and were off at the full speed that they could get out of their horses.

Diamond Dick meanwhile had plunged into the stream, and his wild, weird, appalling war-cry was heard far down the valley, while, as he crossed the ford, he threw his repeating rifle to his shoulder and sent half a dozen bullets flying after Bert Rosser and his Sixes, who had no need of the whizzing of the leaden messengers about their ears to increase their speed.

Diamond Dick knew, firing as he did in motion, and with the fugitives in full flight and some four hundred yards away, that it would be an accident if he hit one of them.

This accident did not happen, and the men were glad to turn a bend in the valley and get out of sight, if not out of range.

The moment that they disappeared, Diamond Dick placed his bugle to his lips again, and sent forth note after note that he felt would keep the men in flight, as he was blowing the rally, as though calling for cavalry to hasten to the front.

Once across the ford he threw himself from his horse and hastened up to Captain Stanley, who said pleasantly:

"Your company's coming sir, has frightened my persecutors half out of their wits.

"Is it a troop from Fort Crag?"

"There is no troop with me, sir, only my pack-horse for company," said Diamond Dick with a smile.

"No soldiers with you?" asked Captain Stanley with surprise.

"Not a soldier, sir.

"I saw that you were in trouble, so I blew a bugle call and started to your rescue.

"Fortunately my plan panned out well."

"They were seven to one against you, sir."

"When I can be of service, sir, I never count odds," was the remark of Diamond Dick, who had, as he spoke, freed Captain Stanley of his bonds.

Stretching forth his hand the released prisoner said:

"My name is Loyd Stanley, sir, and my home is near Cross Trails City.

"I know that I owe you my life, for those men intended to kill me, rather than, by my reporting on them, have the settlers string them up.

"Now, sir, may I know the name of my gallant rescuer, for I believe we have never met before?"

"My name is George McClellan, sir, but on the frontier I have been given the name of Diamond Dick."

"Diamond Dick!"

"Yes, sir."

"The man of all men I wished most to see."

"Indeed, sir, then I am happy indeed to have crossed your path so opportunely."

"And I am happy to meet you, sir, for only this morning I parted with your particular pard, Arizona Charlie."

It was Diamond Dick's time now to exclaim, and he cried excitedly, for once losing his calm mien:

"Arizona Charlie!"

"You can only mean Charlie Meadows of the Tonto Basin?"

"He is the man I mean, sir."

"Why I came here to find him, sir; that is I was on his trail, having gone to Fort Crag in my search for him."

"Well, Diamond Dick, I left him about six hours ago, and he was following the trail of a prisoner who had escaped from him."

"I will thank you to tell me just where, sir, for I must find him."

"I will go with you to the spot where I left him, for we can camp to night at the Joslyn Ranch, and pick his trail up at day light."

"I thank you, sir.

"Shall we start at once?"

"Yes, for we will hardly reach the ranch I spoke of until a couple of hours after night-fall, and we can get better acquainted as we ride along together."

The two then mounted and started off on the trail down the valley, the same that Bert Rosser and his Sixes had taken.

CHAPTER XLI.

THE PARTING.

THE trail of Bert Rosser and his men was followed down the valley for a mile or more, when suddenly it swept to the right, following the river, and thus on to the mountains beyond.

As far as could be seen they had held on to their speed, and were evidently anxious to reach a ford several miles below and cross into the mountain country the other side of the river.

But the captain and Diamond Dick held to the left, on the trail that would lead them back by the Blue Water Spring to the Joslyn Ranch.

As the horses could get feed and a good night's rest at the ranch, Captain Stanley suggested urging them well along, and it was just nine o'clock when they rode up to the cabin of the cowboys on the Joslyn Ranch.

They at once came out and said they would open the rancho's cabin for them, for the latter had not returned.

This they did, and supper was cooked for them, as the two cowboys knew Captain Stanley well, and that he had always been a most welcome guest with Jack Joslyn.

During the ride the captain had told the story of the attempted kidnapping of his daughter, and Jack Joslyn's rescue of her, with the story told by Doc Daly of the rancho's being none other than Major Muerte the outlaw chief.

"How long has he been here, sir?"

"Some two years."

"You knew him?"

"Intimately."

"And always looked upon him as a square man?"

"Yes, indeed, though a trifle wild.

"Why he went to school to my daughter, gave up drink and became as steady a young fellow as there was in the settlement.

"Then he saved Viola from the kidnappers and the *expose* followed."

The story told by Jack Joslyn of his twin brother, and his being mistaken for him was then made known, to all of which Diamond Dick listened with the deepest interest.

At last Diamond Dick said:

"Well, sir, I am satisfied that this man is either Muerte, or his twin brother.

"Which he is we must find out, and if he is the twin brother of Muerte he must prove that he is to our satisfaction."

"And if he is Muerte?"

"Then he will have to hang, sir, for I can tell of a score of his crimes any one of which would sentence him to death before a court trial."

"Well, Arizona Charlie is upon his trail, and I'll put you on the latter's trail to-morrow and you can follow him, for I must go on to my home, as my wife and daughter will be anxious about me, and to-morrow night I will have to stop in Cross Trails City."

Having had their supper the captain and Dick retired to bed, and slept soundly until aroused by the cowboys at dawn, who already had breakfast for them in their cabin.

The sun was just peering over the distant mountain horizon when Captain Stanley and Diamond Dick rode the two hospitable cowboys good-by and rode away so find the trail of Arizona Charlie.

The spot was soon reached where the two had parted company the day before, and at once Diamond Dick studied the tracks with deep interest.

"I wish to get the tracks of the two animals of Joslyn fixed in my mind, as well as that of Arizona Charlie's horse.

"The three will leave a broad trail which I can follow in a lope, and my horses are not worn by their trip."

After some further conversation together and making a promise to come to Stanley Ranch if he should not find Charlie Meadows, Diamond Dick grasped the captain's hand and rode away on the trail of his comrade, who, in turn, was following the trail of Jack Joslyn, his escaped prisoner.

Captain Stanley watched him ride away

until he disappeared in the distance, and then muttered to himself:

"There goes another remarkable man, a fair match for Arizona Charlie.

"Well, this far western country, and this wild life is just what creates such splendid, daring specimens of manhood.

"How lucky that he came upon me as he did, for those devils meant to kill me, I am certain.

"Now I will go to the settlement, and my story will soon shut Bert Rosser and his men out of coming there.

"Then homeward must I go, for I am fretted greatly at Viola's love for that fellow, who I now begin to fear is what we at first believed him to be.

"Still, he is welcome to the doubt, if there is any."

So musing, Captain Stanley turned his horse's head toward Cross Trails City.

CHAPTER XLII.

WHAT WAS OVERHEARD.

As has been seen, Jack Joslyn, after leaving the Stanley Ranch, made his way with all haste to his own home.

There he fitted himself out with other things he might need, and took with him certain valuables he had there, for he did not know but that his home would be searched and when he would ever return.

He got his best horse and made a pack-animal of him, and leaving the ranch in the night, set off on a trail that would lead him to the mountains.

He was anxious to get all the space between himself and pursuit that he could, and more, he was equally desirous of throwing Arizona Charlie off his trail.

To do this he knew that he must speedily reach what would be a trackless country, and this he could find in the barren mountains beyond the river.

He held on through the night until day-break, when he reached the river-bank, and crossing went into camp.

"I have all of ten hours' start at any rate, so can afford to rest until noon," he muttered.

A good camping-place was found, the horses were unsaddled and staked out where there was plenty of grass, breakfast was cooked and then the fugitive lay down to rest.

He slept for several hours, and upon awakening began to look about on foot for the best trail to take.

Half a mile from his camp he came to a canyon where the soil was so rocky no track could be seen, and by following this he could continue on up the river for some twenty miles where there was a ford which he could cross and again be in fertile lands.

To follow his trail through the barren country he knew would take Arizona Charlie a couple of days, even if he was able to do so at all, and he having gained the grasslands, where there was feed for his horse, could pass between Fort Crag and Cross Trails City, and thence on to a part of the country where he knew he would be safe, for it was the old stamping-ground of the Mounted Miners under Muerte, a mining and agricultural country combined.

Having decided upon his course, he returned to his horses, mounted and rode on up the canyon and thence along the ridge, the hard soil and rocky surface leaving but little trace of his having gone that way.

It was nearly sunset when he reached the river, and descended to the ford, intending to come back into the fertile country once more.

But suddenly he halted, for he heard the sound of hoof-strokes.

They were across the river, and he hastily sought cover.

Who could they be?

What could they be?

Were they Indians?

Perhaps they were soldiers from Fort Crag.

If so they could not know of his having been made a prisoner, so he would be safe.

Was it possible that Arizona Charlie anticipated his going in that direction and headed him off, or had the scout simply followed him to the river, learning of his escape soon after he left, and knowing that he would cross at the upper ford, have gone on up to it to meet him?

All these thoughts flashed through the mind of the fugitive as he lay hiding in a thicket awaiting to see who would appear.

A moment passed away, a moment of intense suspense to him, and then a horseman appeared in sight.

Another followed and another until seven men rode into view and halting in the river their horses thrust their noses deep down into the cool, clear waters.

Then it was the time of Jack Joslyn to crouch in terror, for he recognized settlers from Cross Trails City.

Certainly they must be looking for him, and he lay quiet and anxious, the horsemen not three hundred feet away.

Then one of the party spoke and what he said caused Jack Joslyn to listen with rapt attention.

"Well, pards, we outran the soldiers, that is certain, and once we reach yonder mountains we are safe."

"We are, Cap'n Bert," answered another.

"They released our prisoner, Cap'n Stanley, and so heard his story of how we intended to kill him."

"Yes, and just because we came out as Nate Hall told us, to rescue Jack Joslyn from that Arizona Charlie."

"I tell you, pards, if we hadn't decided to kill Cap'n Stanley, we would have been strung up once we reached the settlement."

"Yas, and we don't dare go there now, for we is nothin' more than outlaws."

Every word reached the ears of Jack Joslyn, and at once he decided to act.

CHAPTER XLIII.

COMRADES IN ADVERSITY.

WHEN Jack Joslyn heard the conversation among Bert Rosser's men, as their horses were drinking in the river, it told him that they were, like himself, fugitives.

He gleaned enough to know that he could show himself without fear, as they had been sent by Nate Hall to rescue him from Arizona Charlie, and hence had gotten into trouble.

At once he left his hiding-place, walked out into full view and shouted.

He had not thought of the result, as they were hunted men.

His shout acted like a shock of electricity, for they gave yells of warning and were stampeding like cattle when Bert Rosser recognized the ranchero and halted them by calling out:

"Ho, pards! don't run off like frightened sheep, for it's Jack Joslyn himself."

Even in his perilous situation Jack Joslyn laughed, for he could not but realize that the men had had a bad fright of some kind.

The men halted at Bert Rosser's call, and mounting his horse and leading the pack-animal, Jack Joslyn crossed the river to meet them.

"Well, pards, I am glad to see you; but you are a long way from home," he said.

"Yes, and will have to go still further, Jack, as we are fugitives now, like you, for I take it you killed Arizona Charlie and escaped from him," Bert Rosser replied.

"I did nothing of the kind, for he is not one to be surprised, or easily killed."

"I made my escape from him, however, through the aid of a friend, and as I felt that I could not live at my ranch, with the accusations hanging over me that there are, I went there last night, got what I needed, and was making my way to safety when I spied you."

"Of course I supposed you were hunting me, so hid, until I overheard what you said."

"Now, pards, tell me how goes it with you?"

"I'll tell you just how it goes, Pard Jack," answered Bert Rosser, and he told of what Nate Hall had said to them at the burying of Buck Benson, their decision to attempt his rescue at Blue Water Spring, and how Captain Loyd Stanley had ridden upon them, with their determination to protect themselves at his sacrifice.

"You were in close quarters, pards, and if he did tell on you, of course the settlers would have taken you in hand, and so it was his life or yours."

"But did he escape from you?"

"I'll tell you just how it was, Pard Jack."

"You see, we meant to drown him in the river, leaving his body, and all on it, in such

a way it would look as though it was an accident.

"We intended to leave his horse, with the reins dragging, caught in the underbrush, so the mail rider would find him and all look like a square deal, you see."

"But, you see, we hitched his horse to a tree and he was tied in the saddle, and all of a sudden there came bugle notes from across the river, followed by an officer's voice calling up his men, and we knew a cavalry troop had struck us, for a scout rode into sight."

"Well, Pard Jack, that was no place for us, and so we just dusted for our horses and lit out in great shape, leaving our prisoner, who doubtless was enjoying the way we stampeded."

"I guess the soldiers were well scattered back along the trail, for we didn't see any of them, though they sent a volley of bullets flying after us as we scooted."

"We kept a-dusting, too, and headed for this ford to get into the Barren Mountains, and you can see we were still a little nervous, as your shout nearly stampeded us again."

"And are not the soldiers following you now?"

"I guess so."

"Then we had better recross and go back the way I came, for as Captain Stanley was your prisoner, Arizona Charlie is surely following my trail alone, or, at most, has but one of Stanley's cowboys with him."

"It may be."

"He was not the scout you saw?"

"No, pard Jack, he was not, but the glimpse I got of that fellow showed him to be a dandy."

"Well, boys, we are all fugitives together, and as to aid me got you into your trouble, I will stick by you, and we will go on our way to safety."

"If we meet Arizona Charlie upon my trail, why he will be at our mercy, for we are six to one against him, only we must do him no harm."

"Now, boys, we will cross the river and camp in the mountains yonder, and we can hear the soldiers crossing the ford in the night, and to-morrow see, if they have followed your trail."

"At any rate we go back on the trail I came, and wait for Arizona Charlie to come along, for I would like to turn the tables on him."

"What do you say, Bert, you and your Sixes?"

"You are the captain, Pard Jack," was the answer, and the Sixes gladly acquiesced in this decision of their acknowledged leader.

CHAPTER XLIV.

THE TELL-TALE BULLET.

WHEN Captain Stanley parted from Diamond Dick he went on his way back to Cross Trails City.

He rode into town by making a flank movement, not caring to be seen until he had heard something of what had been going on since his departure, and made his way to the home of Doctor Dillon.

He found the doctor there, and asking about his patient, the answer was:

"He has played us false, captain."

"Played us false!"

"What do you mean, doctor?"

"I mean that I was called away last night, to be gone several hours, and left my Chinese-servant to look after the wants of my patient."

"The Chinaman makes opium, as I know, so put himself to sleep, not believing the wounded man could move out of his bed, as he has appeared so utterly helpless."

"But I am sure his groans of pain, when I probed for the bullet, were assumed now, and I dared not push the probe further, for fear of killing him."

"You think his wound was not as severe as he pretended?"

"By no means so serious, as he evidently extracted the bullet himself, as he left it to me rolled in this bit of paper."

The doctor handed down from the mantel-shelf the paper and bullet.

Upon the former was written:

"Good-by, doctor, and my good wishes for you, and thanks for your kindness."

"As I have no silver to give you for your care of me, I leave you lead, namely: the bullet which Jack Joslyn intended should kill me, and which I extracted, as the wound was not deep."

"Tell Captain Stanley good-by for me, and say that all goes that I said again-t Jack Joslyn, unless I have made a mistake and gotten his twin brother mixed up with him, for they are as like as two bullets, only one is square and honest, the other a devil from 'wayback."

"It's a hard nut to crack anyway, and I leave the puzzle for some one else to solve."

"I take the liberty of borrowing your horse, but help myself to my own weapons, saddle and bridle, while I make a raid on your larder for grub."

"Again good-by, and if we meet again when I can serve you a good turn, I'll do it."

"Yours, in haste,

DOC DALY."

The face of Captain Stanley grew very stern as he read this letter.

At last he said in a low tone:

"Doctor, the writer of this is a finished villain."

"He is indeed, sir."

"He took your horse, then?"

"Yes, and is a judge of good horseflesh, for he took the best one I had."

"Command me for any you may need, for you can have your choice, as you know."

"I well know that, Stanley, and I will call on you if I have to, but I have other animals you know."

"He raided your larder then?"

"Yes, of a week's provisions, that was all."

"Do you know what I think?"

"Well?"

"I am certain now almost, that we have made a mistake in accusing Jack Joslyn."

"You think so?"

"I do."

"And it is my opinion too, for it is reported that strange trails have been seen around through the settlements, and one settler reports having seen Jack Joslyn himself last night in the town, when you know that could not be, and another vows he met him on a trail some miles out."

"I do not see how that could be, and my opinion now is that this twin brother of his, for I must tell you all about it, has been about, and Jack Joslyn is suspected of his acts."

"He has a twin brother then?"

"Yes."

"You shall hear his story."

The captain then told the story, as heard from Jack Joslyn himself, and the doctor listened with deep interest and said:

"I fear we have made a mistake in this matter, Stanley."

"I have the same feeling now, especially as Diamond Dick, a roving plainsman whom I have met, vouches for the twin brother story, and says one went to the bad, the other is a good fellow, and was driven off through being suspected of the deeds done by his brother."

"It will be a pity if we have all erred; but you say Jack Joslyn made his escape from your home after being trusted?"

"Yes, and though at first it looked bad, I now feel that he was certain, as a free man, he could prove his innocence, when, as a prisoner he could not."

"I hardly know what to do now about it."

CHAPTER XLV.

JACK JOSLYN'S DOUBLE.

It was a certainty that Captain Stanley was very much worried at what he had discovered.

The man Daly had been his prisoner, left in his keeping by Arizona Charlie, and though he had intended to keep his promise to him and let him free in some way, after his confession to him, which implicated Joslyn, the fellow had shown doubt of him and escaped.

He had "played 'possum" well, and had deceived every one in regard to the severity of his wound.

In going he had stolen the kind doctor's horse, and in the letter he had left had thrown a doubt upon the man he had accused being really the one he had asserted he was.

"How long has the fellow been gone, doctor?" at last asked Captain Stanley.

"I should judge that he left about midnight, as my Chinaman vows he never went to sleep until then."

"Did you look for his trail?"

"Yes, and it led in the direction of your house, for I followed it from my stable, around Cross Trails City to Cedar Ridge, the scene of the attack upon Miss Viola."

"There you left it?"

"I came back then, for I did not suppose he would dare go to your house, which he

must have passed a couple of hours before daybreak."

"Then he is now far away from here?"

"Oh, yes."

"Well, I will go home to-night, and early enough to follow his trail."

"Now I will see Nate Hall."

"Do not alarm him, for if he is in this affair, let us find it out by watching and not give him any reason to feel that he is suspected."

"You are right."

"I will be cautious."

"Do you have any fear of a meeting between that splendid fellow, Arizona Charlie, and Jack Joslyn?"

"That troubles me also, for Arizona Charlie is upon his trail, and I do not think, even if he is not Muerte, Jack Joslyn would wish to be recaptured and brought back."

"He would not, and being ahead, he could entrap the Arizonian if he knew he was following him."

"Yes, doctor, and all this frets me greatly," and soon after Captain Stanley walked down toward the store.

Nate Hall was in charge and glanced up as he came in.

There were no customers there at the time, and Captain Stanley said:

"Nate, where can I find Bert Rosser and his Sixes, as you all call the half-dozen comrades he always has following him?"

"I don't know, captain, for Bert was in and got some provisions and said they were going off to the mountains for a while."

"You knew that Jack Joslyn had escaped, did you not?" and the captain kept his eyes fixed upon the clerk's face.

He saw a flash of joy come over it, and then came the words:

"Why, how could he escape, sir?"

"Well, we believed his story and trusted him, so he broke his word and ran off."

"He was not rescued, then?"

"Who was there to rescue him, Nate?"

"I don't know, sir, but some were talking about it at the church."

"Yes, but that passed over."

"Well, captain, I do not believe that Jack is guilty."

"Why?"

"Well, sir, I have heard of half a dozen men having seen a man who is the very image of Jack, and what is more, he came here to the store last night and bought some things from me."

"I eyed him close, and intended to ask him who he was, for I was struck with his likeness to Jack; but some one came in to speak to me and he went out the side door there and got on his horse and rode away, and I was told there was half a dozen men with him, and one I know came in and got the goods the fellow who looked like Jack bought."

"No one knew him?"

"Not a soul that I have seen, sir, knew him; but those who saw him said that he was enough like Jack to be his twin brother, and I say so, that he is Jack Joslyn's Double."

"Do you know if Jack Joslyn had a twin brother?"

"Yes, sir, he told me that he had a twin brother, who had caused him much sorrow and trouble, and that he had gone to the bad."

"He told you this?"

"Yes, sir."

"When?"

"You know I often rode home with him Sundays, after church, and stayed at his ranch until the next morning, and so we had long talks there."

"And this man who looked like Jack had men with him?"

"Yes, sir, six or seven, I heard, and I saw them riding off up the road, but did not count them."

"Well, Nate, keep your eyes open for that man, and if he comes again, hold him and send for me."

"I will, sir, for he may be Muerte, the outlaw chief, you accuse Jack of being."

"Yes, he may be," and the captain left the store.

CHAPTER XLVI.

PUZZLING TRAILS.

THE captain left Keep's store more than ever in a quandary about Jack Joslyn, who certainly had a twin brother or a double.

He went the rounds of the little group of houses and shops, to ascertain just who had seen this man, who was so strangely like Jack Joslyn.

The result of his search was that he discovered half a score who had seen him.

He had been met out on the trail to the town by one, and was alone.

He had been seen in the town by half a dozen, and had men with him.

Some one had spoken to him for Jack Joslyn, and he had simply nodded, not replying in the ranchero's cheery way to a salute.

One man had seen him, and with him were seven other men.

All agreed that the men were plainsmen, well mounted, thoroughly armed, and every one of them strangers to Cross Trails City.

With this information he went back to the store and learned from Nate Hall that "Jack Joslyn's Double," as the clerk had called him, had purchased flour, sugar, coffee, bacon, eggs, butter, and some canned goods, enough to last half a dozen men a week, and then Nate recalled that the man who came in after them had said he had a good load for their pack-horse.

Feeling that he could glean no information in Cross Trail City, and anxious to get home, after learning Doc Daly's escape, and his going in that direction, while he was worried about this "Double" and the band of men with him, Captain Stanley mounted his horse and rode homeward.

He kept a close watch for the trail of Doc Daly, where the doctor had told him it flanked the town and came into the Cedar Ridge trail, and at last discovered it.

He saw where Daly had halted at Cedar Ridge right on the spot where his comrade had been killed and where lay the dead horse of Jack Joslyn.

The coyotes ran away from their feast as the captain rode up, and stood awaiting his departure to return to it.

Riding on from there, as no one had been over the trail since Doc Daly had been along, his trail was easily followed.

About half a mile from his ranch, the captain saw that the trail branched off to the right, and went toward the distant mountains, where the fugitive evidently intended seeking a hiding-place, if pursued.

Captain Stanley decided to follow the single trail for a short distance, to see if it still held on to the mountains, and he was just turning back to go to his horse, when he saw that the tracks joined others.

There were the tracks of nine horses in this band, and they had come from toward Cross Trails City, yet not by the regular trail, having kept out upon the prairie to avoid leaving any trace of their passing along that way, it would seem.

The tracks of Doc Daly's horse joined the others and followed on after, all going toward the mountains.

"More mystery," muttered the captain.

"Yes, these must be the tracks of the Double and his men."

"There were eight of them, and they had a pack-horse, so that would make it."

"Doc Daly goes on after them, they were in Cross Trails City last night, and the outlaw escaped last night."

"This is a coincidence."

"This cannot be the trail of Bert Rosser and his men, for they were but seven, even if they could have gotten here, which would be impossible, unless they came along with me."

"Then too they would not have dared go to Cross Trails City."

"No, the Double and his followers came this way, it was said, by those who saw them ride out of town last night."

"If Jack Joslyn is not Muerte, then the one seen in Cross Trails City must be Muerte and he is about here for no good."

"I will go to the fort to-morrow and ask of Major Baldwin a scouting party to hover about the settlement for a week or two, and I'll see that the settlers are put on their guard against a raid of outlaws."

"Now I think of it, I will go to Cross Trails to-morrow and send a courier from there to Fort Crag, for I may be needed even at my own home."

So mused the captain as he rode homeward, and just at sunset dismounted at his door.

CHAPTER XLVII.

TALKING IT OVER.

BOTH Mrs. Stanley and Viola met Captain Stanley as he reached the cabin and welcomed him home.

He saw that his wife was pale, and Viola had a look as though she needed rest.

And both saw that his face was haggard and wore a worried expression.

A hot supper awaited him, and he seemed to relish being at home once more, and no one made mention of what had occurred.

After supper, when the captain, in dressing gown and slippers, was enjoying his pipe, Viola said:

"Father, I did not go in to school to-day, but sent an excuse."

"It was just as well, my child, and I do not care to have you go for some days, not until matters are in a more settled condition than they are at present."

"Is anything wrong, Loyd?" asked his wife.

"I'll tell you just how matters stand, wife, and you can, with Viola, see the situation as it is."

They both felt that he had something of importance to relate and they drew their chairs closer.

"There has been a mistake made, I feel confident, and yet I do not see that any one is to blame for it," he said, after a moment of thought, in which he seemed to be deciding just how to begin.

"You both heard the story told by Joslyn of his wicked twin-brother, and you know what the wounded kidnapper, Doc Daly, said against Jack himself?"

"Yes."

"Well, Doc Daly was not seriously wounded, and last night made his escape, stealing one of the doctor's horses."

"Here is the letter he left the doctor," and Captain Stanley read the letter.

Both Mrs. Stanley and Viola were now anxiously awaiting every word that was said.

"Now this man speaks of Jack's twin brother."

"Yes, father."

"And says that there may be a mistake or implies as much."

"He does, husband."

"Well, he escaped and came on this trail, branching off half a mile from here toward the mountains?"

"So near as that?"

"Yes, wife, but be not alarmed, for I shall ride to Cross Trails City early in the morning, and if I do not go myself, will send a courier to Major Baldwin asking him for a troop to scout about the settlement for awhile."

"Will he send the soldiers, Loyd?"

"Oh, yes, wife, especially as I shall inform him of what has happened here, the arrest of Joslyn, and that Rosser and his gang of six reckless followers, went to rescue him, I am sure, incited to do so by Nate Hall."

"But you both know that it was on account of that I brought Arizona Charlie and his prisoner by here."

"And I set him free," said Viola in a low tone.

"I hope there will not be reason to regret that you did so, my daughter; but let me tell you that if not, I shall be glad of it."

"What is there to fear, father?"

"Mostly, the meeting between Joslyn and Arizona Charlie who is in pursuit of him."

"I do not believe he can find Jack."

"Arizona Charlie is a dangerous man to put upon a trail, Viola; but let me tell you that Jack Joslyn went to his home, got an extra horse and some things and left for the mountains."

"Then he escaped?"

"Arizona Charlie is still on his trail, with the likelihood that he will be joined by another equally as good."

"Who is that?"

"Diamond Dick."

"You know that he is coming here, husband?"

"He is here."

"Where?"

"On Arizona Charlie's trail, overtaking him to join him in the hunt for the outlaw chief Muerte."

"Poor Jack," said Viola.

"Let me tell you that I do not believe

Jack Joslyn to be Muerte, for I have heard of his being in Cross Trails City with six men with him, and all mistook the man for the ranchero."

"Oh, father!"

"It would seem then that Jack has been placed in a most dangerous situation by his evil brother, and did escape to get proof of his own innocence, though he broke his pledge to do so."

"He could prove nothing as a prisoner, father, and was liable to be hanged."

"Yes, Viola, I grant that, so I will not be hard on him for going."

"I only hope, husband, that Arizona Charlie and Jack Joslyn may not meet, for the latter may kill the scout to escape recapture."

"If he does, wife, then he will be killed by Diamond Dick who follows them both, and that man will be merciless to avenge a friend," said the captain with an emphasis that was startling.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

TO GIVE WARNING.

MRS. STANLEY and Viola were both startled by the emphasis with which the captain spoke, and the former asked:

"You know this man, Diamond Dick, then, Loyd?"

"I do, and I know him well."

"I did not know that you had ever met him, father."

"I never did until yesterday, and then I met him under circumstances I will never forget, and which both you, wife, and Viola will thank Heaven that I did, for he saved my life."

It was now the turn of Mrs. Stanley and her daughter to be excited, and they showed how deeply moved they were, until the captain said:

"Keep calm now, and let me tell you the whole story of my meeting with Diamond Dick, and at a time when I stood on the very brink of the grave."

"You know that I have always had a suspicion that Bert Rosser and his men were a hard lot, and that they would bear the closest of watching to prevent them from getting into devilry."

"Yes, husband and I never liked them."

"Nor I," added Viola.

"Well, they went to rescue Jack Joslyn from Arizona Charlie, and I fell into their trap, for I was too confident that they would not dare harm me."

Then the captain told his story of his capture, and his rescue by Diamond Dick.

"You should have taken the oath, Loyd, as it was forced from you, and not binding."

"Yes, for then it would not have been held against you to break an oath you took when your life depended upon it."

"It was better as it turned out, for I found out the gang, and am under no obligations, while I met Diamond Dick by not swearing as they demanded of me."

"I put Diamond Dick on Arizona Charlie's trail, to overtake him, and I learned from him that he had come here, having learned that Major Muerte, the outlaw chief, was alive."

"He came to aid Arizona Charlie run him down, and from him I learned that he had heard of a man being seen who was mistaken for Muerte, when it could not be possible that it was so."

"When I went to Cross Trails City to-day, I learned that Jack Joslyn's Double had been seen by a number, and so I went to work to solve the mystery."

"Coming home to-night I saw that there was a fresh trail, made by eight horses, branching off toward the mountains, and Doc Daly's tracks followed."

"And what do you now think, husband?"

"My opinion is, wife, that this twin brother of Jack Joslyn is the man we want, Muerte, the outlaw chief."

"I believe that he has come here, perhaps to harm his brother Jack, by doing acts which the latter will naturally suffer for, and I do not consider that Joslyn is guilty, and so I am anxious to run down this strange man who so resembles him and quickly settle the matter."

"I sincerely hope that you can do so, father."

"I believe that we can, especially if we can get Arizona Charlie and Diamond Dick

on the trail of this stranger and his men, instead of upon Jack Joslyn's, and then the soldiers from the fort will greatly help things."

"There is reason to believe though, husband, that this Double, as you call him, is roaming about the country for no good?" asked Mrs. Stanley with some anxiety.

"Yes, I fear so, and I shall put the men on their guard to-night, and—"

"But the cowboys have gone, Loyd."

"Gone! and where?"

"You know that they told you how scarce grass was getting near the ranch, and so they drove the cattle and ponies over to Spring Valley."

"When did they go?"

"They went yesterday afternoon."

"And it is fifty miles from here?"

"Yes, so we have no one here now, Loyd."

"Excepting Carter."

"Carter went with the cowboys to help drive the cattle, but will return as soon as possible."

"I will hasten back then to-morrow night, for you will be alone, with only Carter's wife to aid you."

"I thought it strange Carter did not come out when I turned my horse loose upon arrival."

"We will be in no danger, Loyd, I am sure; but come home early to-morrow evening, and I hope Carter can get back also," and the captain saw that Mrs. Stanley was really anxious at the defenseless situation they were in, and promised to return as early as possible, while Viola said cheerily:

"Why, mamma, in this stout cabin you and I could beat off half a dozen outlaws any time."

The next morning the captain started for Cross Trails City to warn the settlers that they must be on the watch, and to dispatch a courier to Major Baldwin for aid.

CHAPTER XLIX.

AN UNERRING TRAILER.

WHEN Arizona Charlie left Captain Stanley he set out upon the trail of Jack Joslyn like a man who meant to see the end of it, cost what it might.

He had the tracks of two horses to follow, and he rode along at a pace that was slow but sure.

After several hours spent in trailing he saw that the fugitive was losing no time, and was doubtless keeping up a faster gait than he was.

He therefore quickened his pace and held to the increased speed as long as he was in the open prairie land.

When, however, he came to rolling country he took his bearings and branched off from the trail.

One might be surprised at this act on the part of Arizona, but the truth was he was as cautious a man as he was brave.

He knew that the way ahead offered innumerable places for an ambush, and a bullet sent right would kill him as quickly as any other man.

A fugitive who did not wish to be tracked down would naturally try and check the one on his path by lying in ambush for him.

At any rate Arizona Charlie did not wish to take chances unless there was a good result to be obtained therefrom.

He had been through that country several times before, and he knew that the course taken by the fugitive would lead him to the ford of the river, and that no other crossing was possible within a number of miles upon either side of the one ahead.

So he was confident that Jack Joslyn was heading for that ford.

With this he left the trail and branched off to one side, following a given direction, watching the country well ahead of him, and keeping about a mile from the trail of Jack Joslyn, as he considered it.

When he neared the river he turned sharply to the left, so as to cross the fugitive's trail, if he had gone on as he believed.

If he did not cross it then he knew that his man had either gone off in another direction, or was lying in ambush for him.

With this knowledge he could turn back and doubtless surprise Jack Joslyn in ambush, where the latter was expecting to surprise him.

When he set out to cross the trail, Arizona

Charlie went so as to go out of range of any place where his foe might be in hiding.

But, after riding some distance, and just as he began to think that he had passed his man, Arizona Charlie came upon the trail.

There was no mistaking, for there were the tracks of Viola's horse Runaway and the pack-animal Joslyn had brought with him from his ranch.

The tracks led straight to the river, but there were rocks and thickets intervening, and so Charlie Meadows dismounted, staked out his horse and went on foot.

He had been reared upon the frontier, had been trained in a school of danger, and where skill, nerve and intelligence alone could save life.

Since his boyhood he had fought and trailed red-skins, had also hunted down thieves and outlaws, and so had become as cunning as an Indian and as clever as a man who was hunted down.

He made his way from place to place, slowly, cautiously, and in each move knew what he was doing, making no false move that might give a hidden foe a chance to kill him.

Had Captain Stanley seen him then he would have felt satisfied that Arizona Charlie was not the man to ride into an ambush.

When at last he reached the river, Charlie Meadows showed no sign of regret that he had lost a couple of hours by leaving the trail, when there was no need of it.

It was his training to be cautious, and he took the loss of time as a matter of course.

He saw that the fugitive had ridden into the river and crossed, for there were no returning tracks.

So he went back for his horse, and after watering him, rode across the river.

There was some grass not far away, and he allowed his horse to feed, just as Jack Joslyn had done, while he scouted ahead on foot.

He had the eyes of a hawk, and soon saw that the fugitive had gone to the ridge, while he knew that it was done to destroy his trail, or rather leave none on the rocky soil.

There Arizona Charlie stopped to think, for he seemed to be undecided as to what he would do, though he knew that the trail lay on up the ridge.

CHAPTER L.

THE MIDNIGHT CAMP.

THE few minutes that Arizona Charlie stood in meditation decided him upon what he would do.

"If Jack Joslyn had gone to the left, after crossing the ford," he mused as he stood looking down at the trail, "why he would have had but one idea in view, and that was to go to the mountains yonder, where a regiment could hardly find him."

"But turning to the right here convinces me that it was done for a blind, for in these barren hills he could find no water, and no grass for his horse."

"He therefore could not intend to stay here, though he would try and imply that he did so, to give me, who he was sure would follow him, that impression."

"So he has only the intention of sticking to the ridge, going as near to the ford above as possible, covering up his trail and recrossing to the other side for some purpose of his own, thus believing that he has thrown me off the scent, and he can make his way to other settlements, and not be hiding in the mountains as a hunted man."

"So sure am I that such is his intention that I shall recross the river and find a camping place, leaving it before dawn to continue on to the upper ford, for I can save thirty miles or more going to the crossing on the other shore, as I can cut off all of the big bend in the stream."

"He is about that distance ahead of me, I take it, and I can head him off at the upper crossing, and if not, I will surely be close upon his heels."

"Yes, that is the course for me to pursue."

Such were the musings of the scout, and he planned well, as the reader knows, for Jack Joslyn had taken the ridge to throw his pursuer off his trail, and to cross again into the settlement country, with a view of reach-

a neighborhood where he would be unknown, and hence not a hunted man.

Having come to a decision of what he deemed best to do, Charlie Meadows returned to his horse, recrossed the river, and started upon his cut-off for the upper ford, the same one where, it will be remembered, Jack Joslyn had so nearly stampeded Bert Rosser and his men, and a long distance below the crossing where Captain Stanley had so nearly met an untimely fate.

The banks of the river were such, with their cliff-like descent, that crossing at other points was an utter impossibility, and the fords even were dangerous in the swift current, broken by rapids and sunken rocks.

Continuing on until nightfall, Arizona Charlie came upon a spot where he decided to camp.

Up a canyon he rode, until he found, near its end, a good grass-plot, and here he staked his horse out, and with his lariat attached to his stake-rope, so as to give the animal ample feeding-ground, and at the same time length enough to feed at a spring near by.

But there was not a particle of wood up the canyon, so the scout went off and got a large armful, with which to cook his supper.

He had to go almost to the mouth of the canyon, and so decided to make his own camp there, knowing his horse would be safe, for the canyon was on all sides like a precipice.

In a niche of the cliff among some fallen rocks, he built his fire and spread his blankets, after which he cooked his supper.

Full of strength and perfect health, tired and hungry he ate his supper with a gusto that many a city man would have envied, and then, in defiance of the advice of physicians, calmly lay down to sleep, having put out his fire so that it would not catch the eye of any one who might be passing along the valley trail half a mile below.

He had been asleep several hours when he awakened with a start.

His training had been such that he was awake in an instant for any work.

Something had aroused him he knew.

A second after he heard the tramp of hoofs, and a voice called out down the valley:

"Camp here, men."

Arizona Charlie lay perfectly still, watching and waiting, while he saw shadowy forms of horses and riders some few hundreds of yards below his position.

A moment after a light flashed up and soon a blaze kindled, as a match was applied to some dry grass and brush.

"We'll stay here until morning, men, and then push on, for the horses need rest."

"Get supper, as quickly as you can and then turn in."

In the mouth of the canyon, the voice sounded clear and distinct, the rocky walls carrying every sound.

"Well, if they are foes, and explore this canyon, here I am caught like a rat in a trap," muttered the scout grimly.

CHAPTER LI.

IN CLOSE QUARTERS.

As the fire burned brightly more wood was thrown on, and crouching among the rocks Arizona Charlie saw that there were eight men and nine horses, as well as he could count them.

If they simply camped there, turning in to their blankets as soon as they had eaten their supper, and departing early in the morning, he was safe.

If they attempted to come up the canyon he might hide from them himself, but his horse would be discovered, should they push on to the end of the rocky walls.

Did they make the exploration in daylight, then he, too, might be discovered.

To escape from the canyon he knew was impossible. Though he might creep out himself, he could never get his horse out undiscovered. He must therefore await the result of their coming.

As he looked he suddenly saw a man come near to the fire upon whom his eyes became riveted.

"It is Jack Joslyn, as I live, the man I am after! It would be death to me now to show myself," and Arizona Charlie clutched his rifle more closely.

"But, who are his companions?" he asked himself, as he caught glimpses of the others passing to and fro.

The party soon sat down to their supper, and Charlie Meadows watched them with the eyes of a hawk.

Having finished their meal, they at once prepared to turn in, apparently keeping no watch, unless a man was stationed down below where the horses were.

Arizona Charlie then gathered up his blankets and possessions, and cautiously glided back up the canyon to where his horse was.

The animal was feeding quietly, and placing his things by his saddle, ready for quick saddling up, the scout returned to his place down the canyon.

He took up his position and thus lay, sleeping lightly until a stir in the camp two hundred yards away aroused him.

It was nearly dawn, and a voice called out:

"Come, men, we will halt on the way for breakfast. We have a long ride to-day, though ample time to make it in, I admit; but we must strike the Stanley Ranch soon after nightfall, and if resistance is made we may be detained some time, and have hard riding to make good our escape afterward; so lose no time now in saddling up. We must spare our horses all we can, for capture to us, after the blow we strike, will mean death at the settlers' hands."

Every word uttered fell with strange distinctness upon the ears of Arizona Charlie in his hiding-place, for, seeing the camp astir, he had dared to creep nearer to overhear everything that might be said.

The words of their leader stirred the men to quick action, and in a few minutes they were mounted and ready to start.

The leader, whom Charlie Meadows had said was Jack Joslyn, then leaped into his saddle and rode to the front, the others following.

When they had disappeared, Arizona Charlie ran quickly up the canyon to his horse, and in ten minutes was mounted and riding down toward the camp of the horsemen.

"We will push on some distance to breakfast, old fellow, and it will be a rest for you, too."

"You'll need it, for I have to flank those fellows, and the ride will be a long one," and the scout spoke to his horse as though he understood just what he was saying.

Having reached the valley, after following the trail of the horsemen for several miles, he suddenly turned out to the right, and set his horse into a rapid gallop.

He was in the rolling lands, and where there was timber, he not yet having reached the prairies.

Keeping steadily to the right, he held his horse at the same pace until half a dozen miles more had been passed over, and then, just as the prairie appeared in view, he halted at a small stream.

Throwing the saddle off his horse, he staked him out to feed, and there was an abundance of grass near, and then set to work to build a fire.

"They are all of ten miles from me, for they kept the regular trail, beyond all doubt, so they will not see my smoke."

"I must get far enough away so as to flank them on the prairie and not be seen by them," and as Arizona Charlie spoke he went on with his work, building a fire and getting out his coffee-pot, frying-pan and provisions for breakfast.

In just one hour he was again in the saddle, and as he struck the level prairie he was glad to see that the horsemen were nowhere in sight.

"Come, old fellow, now you must show your mettle," he said and away went his noble horse in a sweeping canter.

CHAPTER LII.

JUST IN TIME.

ARIZONA CHARLIE kept up the steady pace over the prairie until he began to feel that he must slacken it for the sake of his horse.

He did so near a rise of some feet above the surrounding level, and while his horse rested he stood sweeping the prairie with his field glass, as a sailor does the seas, hoping to catch a view of those whom he was striving so hard to head off.

He gave his horse twenty minutes and then pushed on once more.

As a timber mottle came in sight miles

about, he kept on steadily toward it, and coming within a mile he dismounted and walked alongside of his horse to relieve him of his weight, for he knew that he was pushing him hard.

From the canyon where he had camped to Stanley's ranch was all of sixty miles by the regular trail, but to flank as Arizona Charlie was doing, to avoid being seen by the horsemen would, he knew cause him to ride thirty miles further at least.

It was two o'clock when he reached the motte, and he at once took the saddle and bridle off his horse and began to rub him hard down to refresh him.

He kept this up for a quarter of an hour, and then staked him out to feed, for there was plenty of grass near, while there was a spring of clear water in the timber.

Having seen to the comfort of the animal he took out his haversack and ate a cold dinner, after which he took his field-glass from his saddle and climbed a tree on the outskirts of the motte.

From this lofty position he began once more to sweep the prairies with his glass.

At last he discovered those for whom he searched.

Miles away was a small party of horsemen, and they were riding in the direction in which he was going.

"They are a long way off, and down on the prairie I cannot see them.

"I must push well on to drop out of their sight, while I oblique toward the ranch.

"They are going at a steady pace, and will reach the ranch soon after nightfall, and I must get there ahead of them, with all the time I can make to spare.

"With the captain's cowboys I can stand them off, for I suppose he will be away."

So saying he turned the glass again upon the horsemen and then descended to the ground.

He gave his horse another rubbing, watered him at the spring, and said:

"Now, old fellow, it's a long and a hard pull, but you have had a good hour's rest, a good rubbing, water and food, so you can push ahead."

He did not mount, but led him along for a mile until he warmed him up, and then taking the saddle, started the animal off at a slow canter.

Mile after mile was put behind in this way, and then it was a dismount and walk for twenty minutes as a resting spell for the faithful beast.

Mounting again, the horse was once more put to his steady canter, and it was kept up until the sun was near the horizon, when a halt was made of half an hour at another motte.

The saddle was again taken off, the horse rubbed down and a few mouthfuls of grass given him, with some swallows of water when ready to start.

"Now old horse it's a race, for there goes the sun and you must reach the ranch in an hour's time, for those fellows will not be far behind you.

"Come, push along and when you reach the ranch you will have made all of a hundred miles to day, a splendid feat, my comrade."

He trotted along by the side of the animal for a few hundred yards, then leaped into the saddle and was away.

Again the miles flew behind the hoof-falls of the splendid beast, until at last he began to sag, and for the first time during the day, and with an apology for the act the spurs touched the flanks.

The horse was startled, for his master seldom touched him with the spurs, and sprung ahead more rapidly.

There was a rapid run of a mile and then there came into view a light glimmering across the prairie.

"It is the Stanley Ranch, comrade," said Arizona Charlie kindly, and the horse was held at the killing pace until the buildings loomed up before him.

Then the scout halted, and to his ears came the sound of horses behind him and not very far away.

"Just in time," he muttered, and the horse was urged forward once more and a few minutes after dashed up to the gate in the stockade fence.

The door of the cabin opened then and the form of Viola Stanley appeared in the light

just as Arizona Charlie led his horse into the yard and turning him loose sent him at a run for the stables.

A moment after he met Viola and was ushered into the cabin where Mrs. Stanley awaited his coming, and he uttered the startling words that are in the first chapter of this romance, that the ranch is to be attacked by outlaws, and he will defend them with his life.

CHAPTER LIII.

THE SOLE DEFENDER.

Mrs. STANLEY was startled by the news brought by Arizona Charlie, of an intended attack upon her home by outlaws, and for a moment she was unnerved.

But, she was a soldier's wife, and a fearless borderwoman, so she quickly rallied and said:

"My husband is away, sir, and the other men of the ranch are off with the cattle in the Spring Valley, so we have you for our sole defender, and Heaven protect you."

"Come, mother! With Mr. Meadows as our sole defender you and I must do all in our power to aid him.

"I will see that the shutters are closed and all the doors barred, and call Jane Carter into the cabin, while you get father's rifles to be loaded and ready for use," and Viola was perfectly self-possessed and ready for the emergency.

Her mother at once began to get the captain's weapons, of which he had a good supply, while Arizona Charlie looked over them carefully, loading them to be ready for use.

Meanwhile Viola had called Jane Carter into the house, and then had closed the doors and shutters barring them securely.

By this time the sound of hoofs was heard outside, to be quickly followed by a step upon the walk as some one approached the cabin.

"Ho there!" called out a voice, and Arizona Charlie told Viola to answer.

"Well, who is it?" asked Viola promptly and without fear.

"I am a neighbor, Miss Viola, and would like to stop over night."

"Who are you?"

After a slight hesitation the reply came:

"Settler Spencer."

"You are not settler Spencer, for I know his voice well."

"I am, and if you'll open the door you will see I am."

"I'll not open the door, for I do not know you."

"Where is the captain?"

"He will be along soon with some soldiers from the fort."

There was a silence at this unexpected reply and then the same person outside asked:

"Will you not let me in, Miss Viola?"

"I will not, for you are not Mr. Spencer, and if you do not go away I will signal for the men to come."

Another silence followed and then a voice was heard whispering:

"There is not a man on the place to call," said the intruder.

"Will you go away?"

"No."

"What do you want?"

"I have come after you, Miss Viola Stanley, and I have the men with me to take you, so resistance is in vain."

"You will find that I can defend myself," was the plucky reply of the young girl, although she turned pale at the words of the man, while her mother uttered a cry of alarm.

"Bah! a woman defend herself against eight men! I tell you, girl, we have come to carry you off with us and hold you until we get the ransom we know your father and the settlers will pay for your return."

"Will you submit quietly, for we mean you no harm, or shall we break in and take you?"

"Break in and take her!" was the answer, in the deep, stern voice of Arizona Charlie, who stood, rifle in hand, at one side of the door, with Viola near him, also holding a rifle, Mrs. Stanley standing near the table upon which other weapons lay ready for use, while Jane Carter was on her knees, praying in terror at the thought of the cabin being attacked by the outlaws without and Viola being carried off, as they had threatened to do.

The effect of the response of Charlie Meadows was an alarm, for feet were heard hastily moving as men sprung to shelter, for having been around the premises and found no one, and Viola replying to the first summons, the outlaws supposed there was no man at the place.

"Who are you?" at last asked a different voice from the one that had before spoken.

"I am called Arizona Charlie."

"Have you ever heard the name?" was the quiet response.

"Yes, curse you, and you shall be our game, too."

"Ho, men! break in this door!"

There was heard a movement without, and, an ax having been secured from the wood-pile, a heavy blow fell upon the massive door.

As it did so Arizona Charlie opened fire from a window of the next room and a shriek of pain and a heavy fall followed, with feet heard rushing out of sight.

A return volley was fired by the outlaws, the bullets pattering against the door and stout shutters, and then silence followed for several minutes, when, Arizona Charlie having gone to another window fired a second time, through the shutter which he cautiously opened, and again there was a cry and a stampede, and the rattling of bullets from a scattering discharge of weapons from the assailants.

CHAPTER LIV.

CAPTURED.

"Do not be alarmed, Mrs. Stanley, for I believe we can keep them at bay, and I will make the rounds of the house regularly, getting a chance shot when I can," said Arizona Charlie with the calmness that inspired both Mrs. Stanley and Viola with confidence.

"I feel that no one could do more than you, Mr. Meadows, and our safety is in your hands," was Mrs. Stanley's response.

"I believe you have already put two of them out of the fight, and they will be more cautious now."

"But what if father should return, and alone?"

"They would kill him," and Viola whispered the last words to Arizona Charlie, that her mother might not hear.

"No, he would be warned by the firing, and perhaps an attack from the rear would drive them off," was the answer.

Then Arizona Charlie started upon his rounds of the cabin, going from room to room in the darkness, and listening at each window before opening the heavy shutter.

He had gone the rounds once, without getting a shot, when suddenly a voice without asked:

"Will you come out, girl, or shall I set your house on fire and drive you all out?"

"Miss Stanley will not come out, and I defy you to carry out your threat," said Arizona Charlie, and he hastened to the next room noiselessly, hoping to get a shot at the speaker.

At the same time Viola went into the rear room, and thence to the kitchen in the back of the cabin.

As she entered the kitchen she heard her name called at the rear door.

"Viola!"

She listened and said:

"Who is there?"

"It is me, child, open the door quick!"

She sprung to the door, took down the heavy bar and opened it.

As he did so, instead of her father, as she supposed it was, a tall form stood there, and seizing her by the arm he dragged her without into the darkness, just as Jane Carter, who had followed her entered the kitchen.

Jane saw the act, and uttering a wild cry of alarm sprung to the door and closed it, hastily putting up the bar while he shouted:

"Come! for they have dragged Miss Viola away!"

In a minute Mrs. Stanley had reached the scene and Arizona Charlie came with a rush.

But just as he would have dashed outside Mrs. Stanley threw herself before him.

"No! no! they would kill you at once."

"It would be madness for you to go outside, and I do not believe they mean harm to my child, only taking her to get gold."

"How did they capture her?" cried Ari-

zona Charlie who now felt that it would indeed be an act of madness and do no good for him to rush out to the rescue.

"This door was barred when I last came through."

"Yes, sir, but some one spoke to her without, and I think she said it was her father and opened the door, when a tall man seized her, sir. Yes, sir, a man who was none other than Jack Joslyn," and Jane Carter began to weep piteously, while Mrs. Stanley found it hard to control her grief.

Turning to the mother, Charlie Meadows said:

"My dear madam, having captured Miss Viola now, they will depart, and I can go out, get a fresh horse, for mine is dead beat, I having ridden him all of a hundred miles to-day, and I can follow them."

"I will mark the trail so that it can readily be tracked, and Captain Stanley can follow with a force of settlers who can soon rescue your daughter, for I will not leave their trail until I see the end of it."

There was something in the words of Charlie Meadows that inspired Mrs. Stanley with confidence, and Jane Carter, also, and the former said:

"I believe in you, have faith in you, Mr. Meadows, but you must not leave this cabin until we know those men have left, even though they carry my daughter with them."

"You shall not be sacrificed, sir, when no good can come of it— Hark! they are still without," and as Mrs. Stanley spoke there came a patter of bullets against the cabin, following by a cheer from half a dozen throats.

And answering that cheer, from a long way off on the prairie was heard a wild, weird, piercing war-cry.

Instantly there were cries of alarm without, and hastening feet, just as another of those prolonged war-cries was heard.

"Hal! I know that war-cry among a thousand, and help is near!"

"Mrs. Stanley, the man who uttered that wild battle-yell is my pard, Diamond Dick!"

"Now to the rescue of your daughter," and Arizona Charlie threw open the door and sprang out into the darkness.

The two Quick-Shot Pards were on the trail!

CHAPTER LV.

TRACKING A FRIEND.

CAPTAIN STANLEY left Diamond Dick upon the trail of Arizona Charlie, his friend, and that roving frontiersman set out with the firm determination to follow his pard, go where he might.

He knew what he was, in turn, trailing Jack Joslyn, who, with his two horses, left a broad track to follow.

So Diamond Dick started out, hoping to overtake Arizona Charlie within a given time.

No one would have cared to be better mounted than he was, and his pack-horse was almost as good an animal as the one he rode, while he was figuratively speaking armed to the teeth, and his outfit was all that could be desired for a tramp through the wilds.

He pushed ahead at a gait which he believed would be slightly faster than Arizona Charlie's pace, for he well knew that his friend was not a man to follow on the trail of a foe in such a way that he would ride into an ambush prepared for him.

He reached the ford where Jack Joslyn had crossed, and found the trail of Charlie Meadows there also.

But the latter's trail he saw came back across the river, and then went on up the left bank of the stream.

He crossed and made a thorough search, and returning, went into camp for the night.

At dawn he started again, and came to the camp at the mouth of the canyon, where the horsemen had halted for the night.

A perfect plainsman, he read signs skillfully, and as the trail of his friend went further on up the canyon, he followed it.

Finding the spot where Arizona's little camp-fire had been built, he went on up to where the horse of the scout had been staked out during the night, and he was not very long in reading the exact situation.

"Yes, Charlie camped here first, and they

had him cornered here, yet did not find him, for here his trail leads out, and no other tracks went up the canyon.

"Now, who are these horsemen?"

"I have not time to investigate, but I'll wager big money they are the gang who had Captain Stanley a prisoner."

"Well, Charlie's trail will soon show what is up, and it is certain that he has given up tracking Joslyn for some reason."

So saying, Diamond Dick went back to where he had left his horse and rode away upon the now broad trail, and not an hour behind the friend he wished to overtake.

He at last came to the place where the trail of Arizona Charlie branched off from the main trail.

He seemed to have given up following the horsemen also.

Here Diamond Dick stopped and considered the situation.

At last he had arrived at a decision.

"Well, Charlie has turned off here for some good reason, and I notice that his trail shows that he began to push his horse hard."

"I do not believe that he is over ten miles ahead, for he camped in that canyon last night, and as my horses never say die, I'll catch him."

So Diamond Dick pushed his horses to a rapid pace and the pack-horse followed readily without being led.

After a long ride he came to where Arizona Charlie had halted for breakfast, and here he made a short stop to rest his horses.

Pushing on he could see that Arizona Charlie was crowding his horse hard for some reason, and he did the same.

About eight miles behind Charlie Meadows he arrived at the motte where he had halted for dinner, and here too he made a stop, for both of his horses were commencing to feel the strain to which he had put them.

Again he started however, having devoted the same care to his two animals that Arizona Charlie had to his horse, thus refreshing them greatly.

"Charlie is riding against time and making a flank movement for some reason, as his trail has plainly shown."

"He has a strong motive for riding thus, I'll wager high," and thus musing Diamond Dick kept up the same slapping pace.

The trail showed how the Arizonian had been pushing his horse, and Diamond Dick was not the man to drop behind with good horseflesh under him.

So on he went until darkness fell.

The pack-horse began to lag behind, so was driven ahead, and both animals were shoved to their utmost.

At last, far across the prairie flashed a light.

Then another flash was seen, and another.

Diamond Dick drew rein and listened.

To his ears came the sharp reports of rifles.

"Hal! there is fighting going on there and my pard is in it, though I have not seen his trail since nightfall."

"Come! to the rescue now it is!" and the horses were forced ahead at full speed, until the ranch was in sight, and then loud rung out the war-cry of Diamond Dick to let his pard know that help was near if he was the one who needed it.

CHAPTER LVI.

FOILED.

WHEN night had fallen upon the prairie Diamond Dick could not, of course, see the trail left by Arizona Charlie.

He took its course, however, and held on, hoping he would not go far wrong, and well aware that he was approaching a line of ranches, some of which he would doubtless find.

He had kept up his pace and happened to go almost directly on the trail he had been following, for his way led him to where he saw the flash of the rifles in the attack upon the Stanley Ranch.

His weird war-whoop was heard by Arizona Charlie even in the cabin, and was recognized by him, too, for he had often been with his pard when he had uttered that same wild cry in going into battle, a cry that was always sure to fill a foe with dread.

The outlaws heard it, too, and hearing the patter of the two horses they sounded to

them like many hoofs, and they threw themselves upon their horses and fled.

No, not upon their horses, but upon fresh animals, taken from the stables of the ranch, yet they drove the ones they had ridden ahead of them, as, not having been pushed, as had Arizona Charlie's steed, they were not tired out.

The Wild West Rover came on toward the cabin, his rifle ready, and still giving utterance to his wild war-cries.

As he dashed up to the stockade fence he was met by Arizona Charlie, who greeted him with one of his own peculiar battle-yells as a welcome.

"Ho, Arizona Charlie, you are there!"

"Yes, my gallant Diamond Dick, and you are here!"

"But where on earth did you spring from?" and the two friends grasped hands.

"Oh, I came over to look you up, met Rancho Stanley, and he put me on your trail, and seeing that you were pushing the breeze for all that your horse could do, I did the same, and here I am, a little late, but ready for business, so what is to be done?" and Diamond Dick threw himself from his saddle.

"Captain Stanley met you then, and you were looking me up, eh?"

"Well, you have found me Dick, and there is work for both of us, and I intended to send for you."

"Good! but what's the pow-wow?"

"I heard a band of outlaws plot to come here and attack this cabin, and I rode to head them off, getting here just ahead of them."

"Yes, I followed your trail until night, and the fring was a light-house for me after that."

"I saw where you had camped, and in mighty close quarters too."

"Yes, and I found the family here without aid, for the cowboys are away with the cattle, and the captain, for this is Captain Loyd Stanley's ranch, is in Cross Trails City."

"I did my best, though, and hoped to stand them off, when Miss Viola Stanley thought she heard her father at the kitchen door and opening it was seized and carried off."

"To the rescue then, Charlie."

"Yes, but let us go and get fresh horses, for mine is used up and yours too, I see."

"A hundred miles a day is a big journey, Charlie."

"It is indeed; but we will go in and see Mrs. Stanley and then start on the trail."

"Good!"

Entering the cabin Charlie Meadows said: "I told you whose war-cry that was, Mrs. Stanley, for here is my old friend Diamond Dick, so you need have no fear but that we will bring Miss Viola back to you."

Mrs. Stanley grasped Diamond Dick's hand, and he said:

"I am sorry Charlie and I could not have arrived together and earlier, Mrs. Stanley; but have no fear about your daughter, for we will bring her back to you, for both Arizona Charlie and I will pledge you that, yes, and her kidnappers shall not go unpunished."

"But now can we make a raid upon your stables for horses, as those we rode are used up?"

"Yes, indeed, help yourselves, and Jane will have supper for you before you start."

Lanterns were lighted and the two friends left the cabin together.

Charlie Meadows's first act was to look for, as he said, "his game."

But nowhere could he find the body of an outlaw.

"They have carried off their dead as the Indians do," said Diamond Dick, "for if you say you bagged two, then two went down."

Finding no bodies of the outlaws they went on out to the stables and there a great disappointment met them, for every horse upon the ranch, a dozen in number, was gone, and they were foiled in their intended pursuit.

CHAPTER LVII.

THE RUN TO TOWN.

THE two friends stood and looked at each other aghast.

They had certainly been foiled by the outlaw kidnappers of Viola Stanley.

There was but one horse visible, and that was the tired-out animal of Arizona Charlie, found in the rear of the corral, his saddle and bridle still on him.

In front of the cabin stood the two horses of Diamond Dick, equally as used up.

What was to be done?

The horses of the ranch that ran in droves had all been driven off by the cowboys of the place, along with the cattle.

Cross Trails City was the nearest place where horses could be gotten, and that was ten miles away.

They hated to go in and report to Mrs. Stanley the result of their discovery.

They, however, could do nothing else, and so Charlie acted as spokesman.

"Mrs. Stanley, I am sorry to tell you that those devils have taken every horse on the place," he said.

"My poor child!

"What will become of her?" cried Mrs. Stanley, wringing her hands.

"Now don't you feel disturbed, Mrs. Stanley, for I will leave Diamond Dick here with you, while I strike a trot for Cross Trails City, for I am a good goer on foot, and our horses could not make it as soon as I can, so I'll take a bite and skip."

"It is such a long way and— But surely they left Viola's buckboard ponies?"

"No, madam, they are gone, and her saddle also; but let me tell you that forty miles from here, when I came here, I left in camp eight splendid fellows, Arizona cowboys, who are trail-ers, fighters and square-all-round fellows.

"They have been with me on many a trail, and know me as I do them, and though they are prospecting now for yellow metal, they will drop work and join me on a trail where a woman is to be rescued; in fact, they are oath-bound to serve me whenever I call, and we are all under the same pledge to serve each other.

"I will take a jump for Cross Trails, get horses for Dick and myself, and we will light out there for the camp of my 'Angels,' for let me tell you that we have rescued so many people, Mrs. Stanley, from the Indians and outlaws, they call the boys Arizona Charlie's Angels down in the Tonto Basin, so you see we understand our business and don't you be worried.

"I'll find out about the captain too, and he shall not go along with us, but remain with you."

"I declare, Mr. Meadows, you really give me the greatest hope, and I have faith in you and your friend, yes, and your Angels, too, to do all that you promise me; but come, supper is ready, and you must eat heartily."

"Trust me for that, Mrs. Stanley, for if I was to be hanged to-night, I'd enjoy my supper."

"I never worry about anything, never cross a bridge, as the saying goes, until I get to it," and Arizona Charlie and Diamond Dick sat down to eat supper, for they needed it after their scanty fare on the way and their long ride.

"You have not told us, Mr. Meadows, how you came to find these men, when you left here, you know, on the track of Jack Joslyn?"

"Yes, madam, and I found him with those men, so after all the accusations were right."

"Ah! then he it was who led them here, and his band consisted of Bert Rosser and his six followers."

"It would seem so, Mrs. Stanley, though I do not know Rosser and his men."

"I thought the second man who spoke to-night, had a familiar voice."

"Yes, it was Joslyn who spoke then."

"And Viola is in his power, and after her aiding him to escape?"

"For that very reason, madam, he will be sure to treat her with remarkable kindness."

"He evidently believes that she is in love with him, and will forgive his carrying her off, but from my slight knowledge of Miss Viola, I think she will despise him for his treachery to her and abhor him for his wickedness."

"As any true woman would," said Diamond Dick.

"Yes, and that is Viola's nature," added her mother.

Arizona Charlie having finished his supper got ready for his run to town, while Diamond Dick took the lantern and went out to care for his own and his pard's horses.

"Expect me back before daybreak, Mrs. Stanley," said Charlie Meadows, and parting from Diamond Dick at the gate he started off at a swinging Indian trot, which he well knew would take him to Cross Trails City within two hours' time.

CHAPTER LVIII.

OVERTAKEN AT THE FORD.

CAPTAIN STANLEY rode rapidly in to Cross Trails City, after leaving home, for he was anxious to find a courier there to start off for aid to the fort as soon as possible, that he might return to his ranch and serve as a protector, should the band of outlaws visit there, for he was sure now that Muerte the outlaw was about with his band, bent on some mischief, and that

Jack Joslyn was a much abused and falsely accused man.

Arriving at Cross Trails City he found the doctor away from home, and he knew of no man there who could carry a letter to Fort Crag, all the men being away, and the settlers upon their ranches.

Seeking Nate Hall he was told that an officer and four soldiers had left the town that morning, having stopped there all night, and had about two hours' start of him.

The captain at once took one of the doctor's horses, leaving his own there for his return, and struck off in chase of the army officer.

He knew that he had all of ten miles' start of him, and that he must double the gait at which the others were traveling to catch them by the time they reached the river.

But his horse was a good one and he put him to it.

It was just one o'clock when he reached the river, the scene where he had so nearly lost his life, and found the soldiers nooning there.

The officer arose as he approached him, and was a handsome man of thirty, wearing the shoulder-straps of a captain.

"I am Lloyd Stanley, sir, an ex-army officer, now a ranchero of Cross Trails City settlement, and I hastened after you to request that you bear a message from me to Major Frank Baldwin, of Fort Crag," said the captain.

"Ah, Captain Stanley, I know of you, sir, and am glad to meet you—I am George Everhart, of the —th Cavalry, and I am going to Fort Crag, on a special mission to Major Baldwin, and shall be glad to convey any message, sir."

"I am just from Fort Wingate."

The two shook hands, and joining Captain Everhart in his noonday meal, Captain Stanley gave him an account of all that had happened, and made the request for a troop to scour through the country in search of the outlaws.

"I will tell you, Captain Stanley, that I am going to Crag to get a troop, a company of mounted infantry, and a section of light artillery, to make a scout along the border of the Indian country, as a reminder that we are watching them, for reports have come in to Wingate and to Antelope Post that the redskins are beginning to get very restive of late."

"I have been stationed in Chicago, but asked for special service on the border, and was assigned to this work, so with Major Baldwin's permission I can make a round of the settlements, also, and see if we can capture those outlaws, though, let me tell you, that if Arizona Charlie and Diamond Dick can get on their trail they will soon ferret them out."

"You know those two men, then, sir?"

"Yes, Arizona Charlie served with me in the Apache war, and a better scout and fighter I do not care for, while, let me tell you a little romance about Diamond Dick."

"Yes, sir."

"It was through Diamond Dick that I got my wife."

"Her father had emigrated West, and was killed on the way, her mother died of a broken heart, and she was adopted by a settler in Garden Valley, when she was a girl of fifteen."

"An outlaw captured her, and Diamond Dick, then a boy hermit in the mountains, rescued her, and I was the one to escort her back to the settlement, her home, for I was a lieutenant then."

"Well, I fell in love with her, the regard was mutual, and I left her in Chicago two weeks ago with our little son, who bears the name of Dick after Diamond Dick, so you see I know what he is and what he can do."

"Since those days Diamond Dick, whose real name by the way, is George McClellan, has been a rover of the wild West, going at will from place to place, and a man ever ready to do a good deed, as daring as he is a good fellow, generous to a fault and a true friend."

"I tell you nothing pleases our little boy more than to call him Diamond Dick."

Captain Stanley seemed much pleased with this story of Diamond Dick, and Captain Everhart added:

"Major Baldwin knows him well too, for he commanded the fort then when I was serving, and had the warmest friendship for Dick."

"When you see him give him my regards, and if you can get him and Arizona Charlie on the trail of those outlaws, then they are as good as hanged."

As it was now growing late, Captain Stanley bade the gallant young officer good-by and started upon his return to Cross Trails City.

CHAPTER LIX.

WELL MET.

WHEN Captain Stanley left the ford, upon his return home, it was three o'clock, and he rode back over the trail as rapidly as he could, as he had to stop in Cross Trails City and was anxious to get home as soon as possible.

It was sunset however, when he reached the settlement, and going to the doctor's he was made to stay to supper, as there was some news stirring about that the physician wished to tell him about.

This news was that in two of his professional

visits that day to the ranches to the southward he had been told by the settlers living there that Jack Joslyn had passed with seven men, all of whom were strangers to those who saw him.

They had spoken to Joslyn as he passed them, and he had merely nodded in return, saying nothing.

"What course did they take?" asked the captain.

"They were coming up from the river valley, the two men said who met them, and heading toward your ranch," answered the doctor.

"Yes, their trail led down that way that I saw, and Doc Daly's tracks followed it, so they must have been returning."

"When did they see them?"

"This morning, for I came home at a rapid gait."

"It is not Jack Joslyn, though, I am sure, doctor, but Muerte, and I must hasten home now, as I would hate to have those men go to my ranch and alarm my wife and daughter."

The captain then saddled his own horse and started homeward, stopping at the store, however, to make a few needed purchases, so that it was some time after nightfall before he got away.

With his purchases upon his horse he could not ride very rapidly, and when he arrived in sight of home he was surprised to see no light to greet him, for Viola always placed a lamp at night out upon the piazza as a beacon.

He had reached within a mile of his ranch when he detected a dark form ahead.

"It is a man on foot," he muttered, just as there rung out:

"Halt there!"

"Who are you?"

"Ho, Arizona Charlie, I recognize that voice."

"I am Stanley."

Arizona Charlie came quickly forward now and said:

"I am glad to meet you, captain, and I thought it was you; but we have had a hard gang about to-night and I wished to be on the safe side, so covered you with my rifle."

"What are you doing here, and on foot?"

"Rode my horse down trying to get in ahead of Jack Joslyn and his gang, who visited your ranch to-night and, I regret awfully to tell you, kidnapped your daughter."

"My God! Come, go back with me and let me know all."

"No, captain, I am off afoot for Cross Trails City, to get horses, for they took every animal you had in the stables."

"And we are powerless to give chase?"

"Just now, yes, sir."

"But Diamond Dick came up on my trail and drove them off, and he is now with your wife."

"Thank Heaven for that."

"But you return while I ride back to the settlement and raise a party of men to—"

"No, captain, that is arranged for, as Diamond Dick and I take the trail at dawn, and I have men not far distant I can call on, and we'll catch those fellows."

"I leave the rescue of my child in your hands, Arizona Charlie, in all confidence, for I dare not desert my poor wife now in sorrow."

"Here, my horse is comparatively fresh, so mount him and put him through, and I'll carry my purchases on to the ranch," and Captain Stanley leaped from his saddle.

Shouldering his purchases the scout leaped into the saddle and said:

"Expect me back within three hours."

"Go to Doctor Dillon's and he will see that you get the best horses in the settlement."

"Ay, ay, sir," and Arizona Charlie was away like the wind.

The captain at once started home at a rapid walk, and as he neared the cabin Diamond Dick suddenly appeared before him and his revolver covered his heart, as he said:

"Hands up, pard!"

"Halt Diamond Dick!" cried the captain as he recognizing the tall form of the roving plainsman.

"I am glad to see you, captain, but as you came afoot, and with a load, I thought I had captured a raider."

"You met Charlie then and gave him your horse."

"Yes, and the brave fellow rode off with full speed; but how is my poor wife?"

"She bears up bravely sir," and the two entered the cabin together.

CHAPTER LX.

THE TWO TRAILERS.

THE meeting between Captain Stanley and his wife was an affecting one, but Mrs. Stanley was soon soothed by the words of her husband when he said:

"They will not harm Viola, my dear, for ransom is what they want; and remember, our two hero friends take the trail to rescue her, and Arizona Charlie has a band of picked and tried men not very far away to aid them, so cheer up."

In talking over the affair with Diamond Dick, Captain Stanley said:

"That man is not Jack Joslyn, I am sure, but his twin brother, who is known as Muerte."

"All reports prove this, for if Jack was met by Rosser and his men, they would be across the river now, hiding in the mountains, and the eight men seen by the settlers, who knew Bert and his Sixes were not they, while all say that they saw Joslyn."

"Now, when Joslyn was flying from Arizona Charlie far to the westward, this man was seen who is his Double, and the tracks I saw led to the southward, and two settlers saw this same party coming back, recognized Jack they said, but did not know those with him."

"This does look conclusive, sir, that the man Joslyn has a Double," Diamond Dick remarked.

"It does, and more, why should Joslyn attempt to kidnap Viola and fire upon my house?"

"But I heard his voice, Loyd, and Mr. Meadows saw and recognized Jack Joslyn."

"The voices of the two men are said to be strangely alike, as they are in looks and bearing."

"No, since this Double has appeared upon the scene, I am sure that Jack Joslyn is a maligned man," earnestly said the captain.

"We will soon know, sir, when Arizona Charlie and his Angels take the trail," remarked Diamond Dick.

Discussing the matter from every point, Diamond Dick gleaned a great deal of information which he hoped would be useful to them on the trail, and much sooner than they expected, they heard Arizona Charlie's cry without.

A moment after in came Doctor Dillon, who said:

"I came to spend the night here, Mrs. Stanley, and see if I can be of service to you."

"It is kind of you, doctor, but Mr. Meadows returned, did he not?"

"Yes, and we brought back for his trip five of the best horses in Cross Trails City."

"He has gone out to the stables with them to give them food and water and have them in good trim for an early start."

Diamond Dick had slipped out the moment he heard his pard's voice, and the two took the horses to the stable.

"I tell you, Dick, they are good ones, and we will take five along, one for the pack, and the others to give us a change for resting them."

"We must be off at dawn."

"Yes, by dawn at furthest."

When the horses were cared for the two trailers went into the cabin, and from what Captain Stanley and the doctor said, Arizona Charlie also felt that Jack Joslyn must have a Double, especially as he himself had seen, if not the rancho, his counterpart.

"Now I shall insist, Charlie, that you and Diamond Dick retire, for you can get four hours' good sleep, and we will have you up in time, breakfast ready and your horses, too, for there is work before you," said the captain, and Mrs. Stanley and the doctor made the same demand that they should get what rest they could.

Ten minutes after they were fast asleep, for they were very tired, and they were not called until the eastern skies began to grow rosy with the approach of dawn.

Then they found a hot breakfast awaiting them, Diamond Dick's pack already on a horse, with some things added by Mrs. Stanley, and their horses saddled and bridled, for the captain and Doctor Dillon had attended to all.

When breakfast was over they buckled on their arms, bade farewell to Mrs. Stanley and the two gentlemen, and mounted their horses, Arizona Charlie remarking:

"Remember, Mrs. Stanley, we are oath-bound to rescue Miss Viola, and do not worry."

"We will fetch her back all right," was Diamond Dick's confident assertion, and raising their sombreros the two splendid-looking bordermen rode away, leading their extra horses and the pack-animal.

Watching them from the piazza, the party there saw them move about the prairie for awhile, and then, picking up the trail they wanted, where the outlaws had gathered together, start off on it at a steady trot, which soon carried them out of sight in the distance.

CHAPTER LXI.

THE SEPARATION.

It was a broad trail that the kidnapers had left behind them for the Quick-Shot Pard to follow, for they had their own horses and those taken from Stanley Ranch, some twenty in number.

The party had left the ranch in twos and threes, but further out all joined together and left the broad trail referred to.

The horses they had with them were good ones, as Charlie Meadows had told Diamond Dick, and had had a good rest and feed after their run from Cross Trails City, so were perfectly fresh.

The two trailers urged them along at a six-mile pace, and by noon had ridden thirty miles, camping just where the fugitive outlaws had halted for breakfast, for their fire was still burning, and a broken-down horse was roaming about the timber.

"We have gained on them, Dick, for they are just about twenty miles ahead of us."

"About that, I take it, Charlie."

"They are making for the San Francisco Mountains, that is certain, and so will go within twenty miles of my Angels, who are encamped in the canyon of the cliff-dwellers."

"I only wish we had your men with us, Charlie."

"So do I, and I'll tell you what I'll do."

"Well?"

"I'll branch off at the night camp and strike for the Cliff-Dwellers' Canyon, while you continue on the trail."

"All right."

"I'll get the boys and push straight out to cross your trail, and that of the outlaws, so you can keep on, marking it well."

"Pard Charlie, I'll do it!"

"If they do not strike out for the San Francisco Mountains, as I believe they will, but instead branch off, then you push right for the Sunset Pass and leave a note there which way they turned off, and mark your own trail well."

"All right, Charlie; I'll do it. But suppose you do not find your Angels at the canyon?"

"I'll be pretty certain to do so, for they are prospecting there."

"But should you not?"

"I'll come on after you and we'll go it alone."

"Good! and we'll get there just the same," said Diamond Dick.

"You bet we will, for if six outlaws can get the best of you and I, Dick, they are welcome to my scalp."

"And mine; but there are eight of them I thought?"

"There was eight, but when I went to school I was taught two from eight leave six."

"I see, you took two off," laconically said Diamond Dick.

"Sure, for I shot to kill, Dick."

"You always hit dead center, Charlie."

"But we must be off."

The horses were soon ready and the two quick-shots were mounting when suddenly Diamond Dick stopped with his foot in his stirrup and pointing to a large and heavy foliaged pine called out:

"Say, Charlie."

"Well, Dick."

"Is not that a pine tree?"

"Why yes."

"Well, did you ever know a pine to bear fruit?"

"What kind of fruit?"

"Grave-yard fruit, I take it, for there is a dead man up in it."

Charlie Meadows turned his horse and both horsemen approached the tree at which Diamond Dick was gazing.

"Well, Diamond Dick, you are right," admitted Arizona Charlie, "these are the two men you shot—tied by their outlaw comrades up in the tree to save making a grave for them."

"Such must be the case, Charlie."

"You have keen eyes, Dick, to have discovered them."

"I'll just climb up the tree and make the closer acquaintance of those gentleman," and up the tree Diamond Dick went.

"They are the fellows, that is certain, one shot in the head, the other in the side, and their comrades robbed them of all excepting their clothes."

"They are tied here to stay, and as we must not lose time, even to do the human act of burying them, we will leave the bodies as we found them, Charlie," called out Diamond Dick to his pard below.

"All right, Dick, we can report the find to Captain Stanley and he will have them buried."

"I thought that I had not missed my men last night," answered Arizona Charlie.

Diamond Dick now descended to the ground and the two friends rode on at the same steady pace as before.

When they reached the night camp at nightfall, Arizona Charlie, after having supper, started away alone through the darkness, to go to the camp of his "Angels," who were some twenty miles away, while Diamond Dick at dawn was to press on after the outlaws.

CHAPTER LXII.

ARIZONA CHARLIE'S ANGELS.

In one of the wild, weird canyons, for which the Territory of Arizona is noted, a party of bold-looking men were seated about a camp-fire, having an earnest talk over a gold find they had made that day.

Upon a piece of buckskin spread out before them were a number of small pieces of gold, and one of the party was saying:

"Well, pards, I hope it will pan out well for us, though I don't see as we will all get to be millionaires out of this find."

"No, but it's paying metal, and in time we can save up a snug sum out of it for all of us, seeing as we are all pards in the little strike."

"Yes, and one more, too, for it was Arizona Charlie who told us to come here, as he thought there was yellow dust in the canyon, so he chips in with us."

"Of course he does, pards, so it's a divide by nine."

"Yes, that's square," assented another, and the party of eight seemed perfectly content with their "find," small though it was, and upon the way it was to be divided.

"Come, boys, we have been so interested over our little find that we've chinned until after midnight, so let's turn in, so as to be ready for work on the morrow."

The canyon was a deep one, where their camp was, and the walls on either side arose, like terraces, and the camp-fire revealed in them caves that had the appearance of having been made by the hand of man.

They had stone wall fronts, and regular rooms in them, for they were the one-time homes of a people of whom little is known, and who have all passed away centuries ago, the Cliff-Dwellers.

In this long-deserted canyon, through which flowed a crystal stream, and here and there bits of fine pasture, the miners had pitched their camp, and gone on the hunt for gold.

They had a pleasant camp, their horses were safe up the canyon, for they could not stray away, and there was food and water in plenty for them.

Just as they were preparing to seek their blankets there came the sound of a horse's hoofs approaching.

He was coming up the canyon, so was not one of their animals.

Every man was on the alert at once, rifle in hand, when, out of the darkness came the words:

"Ho, Angels, don't hold up a pard!"

"The captain!" came in a chorus of voices, and then followed a cheer of welcome as Arizona Charlie rode up to the camp.

"Well, pards, how goes it?" he asked as he shook hands all around.

"We've struck it, pard, and in paying dust, I guess, and there she lies on that buckskin, for we hit the yellow to-day, and were up talking it over," said one.

"Well, pards, I am glad you have hit it, but I am here on an important mission."

"All right, pard cap'n; let her slide."

"I want you to go with me, and to-night."

"We are with you, cap'n."

"Yes, we are."

"You have the call, cap'n, ahead of the yaller."

"We'll be the ones you want, cap'n."

"You knew what to come, Pard Charlie, when you needed us."

"We hain't forgot that an oath binds us, pard."

Such were the expressive utterances that went around, and then Arizona Charlie said:

"I thank you, pards, and it's the more generous of you as you have just found some gold."

"As such is the case, I wish to say that two men of our party must be selected to remain here and hold the claim, at the same time keeping up the search for more of the yellow metal, for six of you will be enough to go with me, as my old quick-shot pard, Diamond Dick, is with us."

The men gave a cheer at this, and then Arizona Charlie went on to say:

"Now, my old foe, Major Muerte, the chief of the Mounted Miners, is not dead, as reported, for he has been seen very lately, and more, he has another band of outlaws and has begun his deeds of devilry by running off with the daughter of Captain Stanley, one of the noblest fellows I ever met."

"Last night they kidnapped her from her home and though I killed two of them they escaped with her."

"Diamond Dick came up in time to push them to rapid flight, and at dawn my pard and I took their trail."

"I left him in camp at sunset, and I pushed on here, while he is to follow them at day-break."

"Now we can get a few hours' rest, and be on our way by dawn, so select the two men who are to keep the camp here, pards, and the rest of us will turn in and rest as long as we can, while they have our horses ready, and breakfast."

"As for myself, I will take a fresh horse in the place of the one I am riding, and if my Angels don't render a good account of themselves then I will be amazingly disappointed."

"Try us, Captain Charlie, and you'll find that not one of us has forgotten that he is oath-bound to obey the call of one of our band."

The two men were then selected by the drawing of lots, for not a man cared to remain behind willingly.

The others then retired to their blankets, while the two who were to remain sat up to get their weapons in trim, have breakfast ready and the horses saddled for an early start.

It was after just three hours' sleep that the Angels were called, and half an hour before dawn they were in the saddle and following their gallant leader to overtake Diamond Dick.

CHAPTER LXIII.

DIAMOND DICK'S "FIND."

DIAMOND DICK had so trained himself that he could awake at the moment he set his mind to do so.

He therefore awoke an hour before dawn, changed the grazing-place of his horses, and cooked his breakfast, so that he was saddled up and ready to move the moment it was light enough to see how to follow the trail.

He pushed on as before, and soon saw that the outlaws could be making for no other point than the San Francisco Mountains, where they would be safe in the wild recesses to be found there.

It was the old haunt of Muerte and his Mounted Miners, or rather their retreating-place, when they would make a raid upon the distant settlements, hold up a stage-coach or attack an emigrant-train.

He had just halted for noon, in a clump of thick pines, when he saw coming up a grass valley a single horseman.

The man was heading toward the pines, and must soon discover his presence there, and to avoid this Diamond Dick seized his rifle, ran rapidly by a flank movement to the lower edge of the thicket, and crouched down behind a large boulder.

On came the horseman, and all unsuspecting of danger he was riding up toward the rock, when suddenly a rifle muzzle peered above it, and the startling words were heard:

"Halt!"

"Hands up, stranger, or die!"

The man did halt, and up went his hands with a promptness as though he was accustomed to being thus held up.

Then out stepped Diamond Dick and faced him, still keeping him covered, while he said, in the quiet, courtly way natural to him:

"Pardon me, my friend, but I need a little information from you, and that we may not have a falling out, I'll relieve you of those dangerous toys you carry."

Still keeping him covered Diamond Dick advanced and unbuckled the belt of arms, and took the rifle lying across the saddle.

"Now, please dismount, and upon this side of your horse."

The man obeyed.

"Put your hands behind you now, and do not forget yourself, but answer what questions I would like to know."

For the first time the man spoke, and in a strong border dialect, for he said:

"What does yer want ter know, for I hain't got much time ter fool away."

"No, seeing as you may be a dead man in less than a minute, if you do not obey me," was the cool response of Diamond Dick.

"Well, what is it?"

"Who are you?"

"How does that consarn you?"

"Answer me!"

"I'm a prospector."

"Prospecting for something to steal?"

"See here, pard, I hain't no thief."

"When did you reform?"

"I never was one."

"What is your name?"

"Dayton Dockery is my name."

"Out here known as Doc Daly, eh?"

"No."

"I say yes."

"I never heard of him."

"Come, Doc Daly, no nonsense with me, for I know you just as well as you do me."

"I never seen you afore."

Diamond Dick laughed and replied:

"See here, Daly, I know you well, and that your pard, Buck Benson, was killed by Jack Joslyn the other night when you attempted to kidnap Miss Stanley at Cedar Ridge, on her way home from Cross Trails City."

"Now you played possum and escaped from Doctor Dillon's cabin, for he deemed you were badly wounded."

"That is the doctor's horse you are riding, and you are going to seek safer quarters, as you and Jack Joslyn are out, after what you told about him."

"Now I knew you as one of Muerte's gang three years ago, and all I have to do is to take you back to Cross Trails City and state who you are, for the settlers will do the rest."

"Now do not deny who you are, but talk business and we may come to terms."

"Well, Diamond Dick, what terms have you to offer?" asked the man, suddenly dropping his dialect.

"Your life, if you do as I demand."

"What is your demand?"

"You know the secret haunt of Muerte and his Mounted Miners?"

"He has several."

"You know them all?"

"Well, yes, I guess I do."

"Where are you going now?"

"Down toward Phoenix."

"Not toward Muerte's retreat?"

"You bet I am not."

"Why?"

"It would not be healthy for me."

"You and Muerte are out, then?"

"We are."

"Then you are prepared to talk business with me?"

"If I can make terms."

"I will give you your life."

"I want more."

"What else?"

"A thousand dollars," was the cool reply.

"Well, wait and make terms with Arizona Charlie and his Angels, for they are not very far behind me," said Diamond Dick, and at his words Doc Daly turned deadly pale.

CHAPTER LXIV.

A COMPACT.

DIAMOND DICK could not but note the effect of his words, which had not been fired at random.

He saw that he had frightened the man and waited for him to speak.

"Do you mean that Arizona Charlie is behind you?" and his voice had a tremor in it.

"Yes."

"And his Angels?"

"They are."

"How far back?"

"Well, if you were willing to talk business we might come to terms before they arrived."

"I know Arizona Charlie is not coming."

"Do you?"

"Yes."

"Then we can't trade."

"He went to Fort Crag with Muerte a prisoner."

"Did he?"

"Yes."

"Well, Muerte escaped from him and was joined by a number of his fiends and they have been in the settlement committing devilry, so Arizona Charlie and I took their trail, and he went after his Angels, where I camped last night, and I came on, for you see yonder is the trail of Muerte and his men, and they have the daughter of Captain Stanley a captive."

"Do you understand now?"

"Yes, and they captured her?"

"They did."

"Then Captain Stanley ought to be willing to pay for her release."

"I am."

"How much?"

"Your life."

"You won't give any gold?"

"Not a dollar."

"I'll trade for one of your diamonds."

"They are not for sale or exchange, but if you kill me I'll will you all of them."

"I have no gun, or I would."

"I have no doubt of that; but shall I give you up to the Angels or will you promise to lead us to the several retreats of Muerte?"

"Won't you compromise on five hundred?"

"Not a dollar."

"I'll call it a hundred."

"Call it what you please, I'll give you lead not gold or precious stones, so what is your decision?"

"I'm a very poor man."

"You'll be a very dead man ten minutes after Arizona Charlie and his Angels arrive, for you know you killed and robbed the paymaster, and in fact your crimes have been too numerous to call over."

Again the man turned livid, and said quickly:

"I'll accept your terms, Diamond Dick."

"You are wise, so now let us sit down here and have a talk, only let me first say that if I see any act of treachery or any attempt at it, I'll put a bullet through your heart as I would shoot a coyote, and then find Muerte myself."

"Do you understand?"

"I do."

"Then act accordingly; but first I will see that you carry no concealed weapons, for I take no chances, Doc Daly, with a villain."

With this Diamond Dick thoroughly searched the man, who knew too well the great quickness and giant strength of his captor to attempt any struggle with him when disarmed.

From an inner pocket he took a derringer pistol, upon which was the name of Doctor Dillon, showing that he had robbed him of it, and in his hip-pocket was a small dirk-knife, also stolen from the physician.

"It shows what you are, Daly, to rob the man that was seeking to save your life, believing you badly wounded."

"Yes; to hang me."

"No, be acted in good faith; but now you are free, only do not attempt to escape or go near that tree where those rifles are, for if you do, as I said, I will kill you."

"I am no fool, Diamond Dick."

"I know when I am well off, and that settles it, if you'll not let that Arizona Charlie and his Angels jump me."

"A compact with me is sacred, Daly, and I'll protect you, while, as soon as you have led us to the retreat of Muerte—mind you, I ask no aid of you otherwise—you shall have a horse and be allowed to go your way."

"And my weapons?"

"Of course, for I would not leave an enemy without arms in this country."

"Well, I'll show you the retreats, for I was betrayed by Muerte and want to see him hanged now, so long as I don't wear a hemp cravat."

"You think Muerte is the ranchero Joslyn, do you not?"

"I know it!"

"How so?"

"I can give you proof of it."

"Who is this other man then, this Double of his?"

"Say, I followed a trail of seven men and a pack-animal after I left the doctor's."

"Well?"

"They turned off before reaching Stanley's ranch, and I went on the same way."

"Yes."

"I found them in camp, crept up near and I saw Jack Joslyn."

"That was all I cared to see, so I left and came this way."

"You are sure that it was Joslyn?"

"Yes, but I did not know the men with him."

"You have heard that Joslyn has a twin brother?"

"Yes, and that is what puzzles me; but Joslyn is the Muerte, whatever the other may be," was the decided response of the prisoner.

CHAPTER LXV.

SPREADING TRAILS.

IN pushing on after Diamond Dick, Arizona Charlie and his Angels made for the nearest point where they could cross his trail if he held on toward the San Francisco Mountains.

At last they came across the trail and discovered that it was following that of the outlaw fugitives.

Pushing on then in high spirits at their discovery, the Angels came upon Diamond Dick in his noon camp, for he had not left it, after capturing Doc Daly.

Arizona Charlie was delighted at finding that Diamond Dick had captured a prisoner, and one of no great value to them, while Doc Daly eyed him and his Angels with a show of dread in his face.

"But Diamond Dick explained the situation fully, the compact he had made with his prisoner, and Arizona Charlie at once ratified it, though he added:

"I was in hopes of catching you with the Mounted Miners, Doc Daly, for well I know you deserve hanging."

"But carry out your compact and we will keep ours."

After a short halt the party mounted and rode on, Doc Daly, for "future reference," as Diamond Dick expressed it, being placed between two of the Angels, greatly to his discomfort, for he seemed to stand in holy horror of Arizona Charlie's pards.

It was just at dark that the party came to a halt not very far from the foot-hills of the San Francisco Mountains.

They halted just where the noon camp of the outlaws had been, for there, as in the other camps, they saw a comfortable wicky-up, evidently made for the seclusion of their captive.

From this camp the trail did not go right on, but divided into almost as many as there were horses in the outlaw party, going off like the spokes of a wheel from the hub.

"What does this mean, Charlie?" asked Diamond Dick.

"Oh, it's only to throw pursuers off the track, for those horses all come together somewhere in the mountains, and their trails are lost as they pass over the rocky lands before us, so it is fortunate that you captured Doc Daly, as it would take us several days to track all three trails."

"Well, shall we go on to-night, Charlie?"

"No, that would be impossible in the mountains; but we will go to the canyons, after we have had supper, and go into hiding among them and to-morrow can push on under our outlaw guide to the retreat, for he must know where he is most likely to find Muerte now."

And so it was arranged that they should have supper there, where their firelight would not be seen, and afterward push on to a sleeping place in the mountain canyon.

It was about midnight when Doc Daly, acting as guide, and now tied to his saddle, to prevent a sudden flight in the darkness, led the party up a canyon where there was water and grass to be found, and they would find a secure hiding-place from which to begin their search.

"How far is the retreat from here?" asked Diamond Dick of the outlaw guide.

"Half a dozen miles."

"Upon the mountain?"

"Yes."

"What kind of riding is it to reach there?"

"Pretty rough, and as the trail leads around a cliff and is only four feet wide, one man could keep a dozen at bay, if he knew they were coming, for he could roll rock down from above, and they have got plenty of that kind of ammunition on hand."

"Well, we must take the chances, Daly," said Arizona Charlie.

"You won't want me to go up to the retreat with you?"

"Oh, yes."

"After I show you the way?" anxiously asked the outlaw.

"Yes, you must lead the way."

"Oh, Lord!"

"Why do you fear?"

"I'll be the first one they'll kill."

"You must take your chances with the rest of us, eh, Dick?"

"He must, indeed."

"I'm afraid I'll go to Glory sure."

"No danger of that."

"You'll not strike the sky trail," said Arizona Charlie, while Diamond Dick added:

"You'll no more join the angel band hereafter than you will be one of Arizona Charlie's Angels on earth, Doc Daly."

"I'm a goner, I fear."

"We will expose you no more than is necessary, not as much in fact as we will ourselves; but you must lead us to the retreat, and if you are treacherous, that seals your fate."

"Be square with us, and you go free with a good outfit."

"Now you know what to expect," and Diamond Dick and Arizona Charlie walked apart to talk over their plans together, while the Angels kept a close watch on the outlaw prisoner.

CHAPTER LXVI.

A FAIR CAPTIVE.

WHEN Viola Stanley heard the whispered words at the kitchen door, which led her to believe that her father had come home and slipped up to the cabin unseen, she was anxious to let him in as quickly as possible.

So she took down the heavy bar, and opening the door cautiously suddenly found her arms grasped in an iron clutch, while she was quickly dragged out into the darkness.

"Resist, girl, and it will be the worst for you," said her captor, hoarsely, and raising her in his arms he fled with her toward the stables.

There she found her horse already saddled and bridled, and several men standing about holding other horses.

She saw that the man who had seized her, as well as those with her, were all masked.

"You must go with me, Miss Stanley, and if you go without resistance, all will be well, for we mean you no harm, only I wish the money your father will pay to have you home again."

"Resist, and I will have you gagged, and tied to your saddle."

"Which shall it be?"

"I will offer no resistance, for I see how powerless I am," was the reply of Viola.

"All right, you are a nice woman."

"Permit me to aid you to mount."

"No, I do not need your aid."

With this she leaped into her saddle.

"Here is my cloak to throw about you, and a cowboy hat, if you will wear it."

She took the cloak and the hat in silence.

"Now, men, be ready to follow, as soon as your comrades come from the cabin, for they are there to kill that devil, Arizona Charlie, if he comes out."

"Are the bodies strapped upon the horses?"

"Yes, all ready, sir," was the answer.

"Then I shall ride on with my captive, and you follow with the captured horses."

With this the man took hold of Viola's bridle-rein and rode out of the stable-yard and through the heavy gate leading upon the prairie.

The men were just starting to follow when, in the lull of the firing which several kept up about the cabin, there was heard a wild yell far out upon the prairie.

Instantly there was great excitement among the outlaws, while the masked chief shouted:

"Great God! I know that war-cry."

"It is Diamond Dick!"

"Come, men, or all is lost!"

"Brave Diamond Dick!" cried Viola, and she hoped that he was coming with a large force to her rescue.

But away sped her captor, leading her horse by the side of his own, and his men drove the loose horses rapidly along behind, while the outlaws at the house came after them with a rush, to which terror added wings.

In this way they got out upon the prairie before Diamond Dick came near enough to discover just what was going on.

Led by the chief they dashed on for miles, their horses kept to a rapid speed, for the outlaws were not certain but that Diamond Dick had others with him and keeping them in sight would follow in hot pursuit.

"Drop back one of you and see if we are followed," cried the chief, and one of the men obeyed.

Ten minutes after he overtook them and reported that no one was in pursuit.

"Good! and they cannot track us to-night, and it will be daylight before they can trail us."

"Evidently Diamond Dick was alone, and if so there are no horses to be had this side of Cross Trails City, so we are safe."

And the chief spoke to Viola, rather than to his men.

"You forget that I have a father who will rescue me," she said, quietly.

"Your father can do no good alone."

"What of Diamond Dick?"

"And Arizona Charlie is there?"

"Three to six."

"Well, I have a belief that those three will yet rescue me."

"The only rescue for you, Miss Stanley, is the price I ask for you."

"How much is that?"

"It will take just ten thousand dollars for your ransom."

"You value me highly, I see."

"Yes, I set the highest figure I believe I can get, for your father is not a rich man, I believe."

"He is not rich enough to pay the sum you demand."

"What then?"

"That is what I was going to ask you."

"If he does not, then the settlers must chip in and help him out with the gold."

"Some may be more willing to help with lead and steel," was the significant reply of Viola, and she then remained silent.

CHAPTER LXVII.

VIOLA'S NERVE.

THE day had not dawned when the party of outlaws halted in a clump of pinyons and pines. Branches were cut at once, and a wicky-up was made for the captive apart to herself.

The chief had a fire built and some coffee made, and Viola took a tin-cup of the beverage and then, with the serapes furnished her, sought rest.

She was determined to keep her strength and courage, and not let the outlaws see she dreaded them.

It was an hour after sunrise when she awoke and breakfast was ready for her.

The bodies of the two dead outlaws had, as she thought, been buried, but instead, to hide that they had been killed, the chief had sent men up into a thick pine to tie them there.

During her breakfast of broiled venison steak, crackers and coffee, Viola expressed herself as ready to continue her flight, for she knew that she could do nothing else.

She leaped again lightly into her saddle and rode by the side of the chief as before.

She in vain tried to see his face, or the faces of his men.

It was impossible, for the black masks they wore wholly concealed them from her closest scrutiny.

Still there was something about the outlaw chief that struck her as very familiar.

At noon another halt was made, of an hour this time, and she was allowed to stroll at will about the timber, for her limbs were cramped from her long and constant riding.

Into the night the outlaws rode, and then when camping, another wicky-up was made for her, and, as before, she was treated with every consideration possible under the circumstances.

Not a word had she caught from the outlaws as to who they were or whither they were going.

Often, during the day, as they passed over some elevation, she would look wistfully back over their trail in the hope of seeing some one coming in pursuit.

But in vain the hope.

The outlaw chief kept on at a steady pace, never once seeming to dread close pursuit, and he showed no anxiety as to being overtaken.

At dawn the party were in the saddle again, and moving toward lofty peaks of mountains ahead of them, and which he had seen from afar off.

As they reached the foot-hills the chief said:

"I know you will be glad to know, Miss Stanley, that two hours more will see our destination, for then you can have rest and a cabin wholly at your disposal."

"You have treated me as well as you could under the circumstances, sir, and I thank you."

"But I shall be glad to rest."

Up the foot-hills they went, then along a ridge that half-encircled one of the peaks, and which at last turned off directly toward the lofty range.

As it neared the peaks it narrowed until they had to ride in Indian file, and where a false step of a horse would hurl them down to death.

The chief led the way and still led Viola's horse.

Just where the ridge joined the peak there was a little valley in the mountains, a few acres in size, and through this they went until they came to an overhanging cliff.

Viola noted with deep regret that on the last few miles of this ride not even an iron-shod hoof would make any impression, so that they left no trail.

Riding under the shelter of the cliff she saw no way to go further, when the chief said:

"For safety we will dismount here, Miss Stanley, for we have to follow around a shelf of rock that is hardly wider than a horse can walk on."

She leaped from her saddle, and when he offered her his arm she declined it, saying:

"I shall not lose my head, sir, nor will I commit suicide by jumping off."

"You are a plucky one indeed," he said, with admiration, and then added:

"The men will follow with the horses, so we will lead the way."

She followed him, calmly looking down into the chasm hundreds of feet below, and then upward at the mountain peaks overhanging them.

"It would be bad if one of those rocks above was loosened and rolled down upon us," she said, very deliberately.

"Yes, and they are our means of defense, if

attacked here, for you see from our retreat our men can hurl those rocks down upon this trail."

"There! now we are safely up the path, and I compliment you upon your nerve, and welcome you to the retreat of the Mounted Miners."

CHAPTER LXVIII.

THE MOUNTED MINERS AT HOME.

THE chief put out his hand, as he welcomed Viola, as though to take hers, but she stepped by him without seeing it, apparently, and turning, watched the horses coming slowly up the steep and perilous pathway.

When the outlaws and horses had passed up in safety, excepting one poor animal that losing his footing, went over the precipice, Viola stood gazing at the vast expanse of scenery, and said:

"You have a perfectly grand view here, Sir Outlaw."

"I love the mountains."

"Yes, the view is grand, and you see we can discover our foes coming when they are many miles away, and so prepare for them."

"Yes, I see."

"Now, Miss Stanley, let me show you our retreat."

She turned and accompanied him up a slope, beyond which was a valley in the mountains, a perfect mountain park, hemmed in on all sides with overhanging cliffs, and with only the pass through which they had come as a place of egress and exit.

In this little park was a stream of water, grass in abundance, wild-flowers and trees, while back under the cliff stood a solitary log cabin.

"What a beautiful spot," said Viola, with real enthusiasm.

"I am glad that you like it, Miss Stanley."

"The cabin there is your home, and I believe we can make you comfortable there, for when last here we *cached** a number of things, which I am sure are still safe."

"Our camp is down there on the stream, and, as I keep a guard at the pass here always, you see there is no chance for escape, even if you dared risk the mountain lion and other wild animals with which these peaks abound."

"You are at liberty to stroll where you please, and your meals will be served to you in your cabin."

"How long am I to remain here, sir?"

"Until the price I ask for you is paid."

"Or I am rescued."

"That is impossible."

"You think so?"

"Why Major Baldwin and his whole command could not rescue you from here, even with the few men that I have, for we could crush a regiment with one avalanche of rocks which we could turn loose upon them."

"Strategy often gains a victory where might and numbers fail."

"Granted."

"But I wish to have a talk with you after awhile with your consent."

"I cannot refuse, sir."

With this Viola went over to the cabin.

It was a pleasant little hut, with a bunk, table and several chairs in it, and one of the outlaws had just cleaned it out.

Blankets were put in there for her and all done to make it as cheery as possible.

But Viola strolled about the park for awhile and upon her return ate her dinner.

She also found other things in the cabin, which had been found intact in the *cache*, and to her surprise there was a trunk of ladies' clothing.

"The chief told me to tell you to make use of all you found, miss, for it's the trunk of an army officer's wife which he robbed a stage of two years ago."

"So help yourself, miss."

"Thank you, I will," and Viola began to look over the things in the trunk, taking out wearing apparel, gloves, shoes, a photograph album and many little trinkets.

In the album was the name of the owner of the trunk, and Viola discovered that she was the wife of an officer then stationed at Fort Crag.

"I hope I may return her this trunk some day," she said.

Soon after the chief was seen approaching and Viola placed a chair outside of the cabin for him, near one she had been seated in.

She was glad the man was coming, for she expected he would make known to her some plan he had for restoring her to her home.

Then too she wished to question him as to himself, for on the trail she had been unable to do so.

He came on slowly, and seeing her raised his sombrero politely.

She saw that his forehead was above the mask was not much browned by exposure.

"I have come to ask if I may have a talk with you, Miss Stanley?" he said courteously.

"Yes, sir, as I said before I cannot refuse you."

"I may be seated here?"

"Yes."

"Thank you."

* Hid away.

"May I ask if my man delivered the trunk and other things to add to your comfort, for they were where I had cached them two years ago?"

"Yes, thank you."

"Now, I suppose you would like to see my face?"

"Just as you please, sir, for I have little curiosity to behold the face of a foe."

"Perhaps I may be a friend. See!"

As he spoke he removed his mask and with a cry of horror Viola Stanley sprang to her feet.

CHAPTER LXIX.

MUERTE THE OUTLAW.

WHEN the outlaw chief had unfastened the black mask behind his head, and then removed it, Viola beheld before her the face of Jack Joslyn.

It was no wonder that she sprung to her feet in horror, for against all her reasoning she had decided that it was not the ranchero, as circumstances had so clearly demonstrated that it was.

The voice seemed not to be his, there was, to her way of reasoning, a difference in the height of her captor and Jack Joslyn.

So she had quickly brought herself to believe that Jack Joslyn's Double was the outlaw chief.

Why the man she had ever been kind to, whom she had set free, when a prisoner to Arizona Charlie, should capture her she could not understand.

"Well, am I a friend?" the man asked with a smile.

She looked him fixedly in the face, and then said:

"No; you are my cruelest, bitterest foe, and I despise you for your treachery to me, Jack Joslyn."

"You are sure that I am Jack Joslyn?"

"Yes, for now I know you, know you as you are in all your heinous wickedness and treachery, outlaw, kidnapper and all that is vile."

The answer of the outlaw was to laugh, and he gazed at Viola with an amused expression upon his face at her intense anger and sarcasm.

At last he asked her:

"Do you know now why I captured you?"

"For gold, of course, you being a robber by nature."

"You are right; I did capture you for gold, but now I see you face to face, I feel that I could give up my evil life, learn to love you and ask you to be my wife, to lure me from the evil of the past."

"You insult me, sir, but of course I am powerless and that is why you show yourself a coward."

"You are severe, Miss Stanley."

"But let us understand each other."

"I understand you perfectly, sir; but too well, now."

"No, I think not, for I am not he whom you mistake me for."

Viola laughed bitterly.

"You doubt me?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

"I know you to be Jack Joslyn."

"I am not."

"Who are you, then?"

"Have you ever heard that Jack Joslyn had a brother?"

"Ah!"

"You have heard so?"

"Yes."

"You have heard he had a twin brother?"

"I have."

"That brother went to the bad, wronged Jack in many ways, and caused him much unhappiness and trouble."

"Yes."

"His name was Jerrold."

"I believe so."

"Well, I am Jerrold Joslyn, Miss Stanley."

Viola started, looked at him fixedly, and then said slowly:

"You are the image of Jack Joslyn, and your voice, bearing, all are like him; but if you are not he, then thank Heaven, for I still have faith in human nature."

"I am Jerrold Joslyn."

"And do you know that your brother is now a fugitive from the hangman for your crimes, liable to be captured at any moment and put to death in your stead?"

"Oh, yes, I know that; yet what do I care?"

"You should care."

"No, for he is good, I am bad."

"I went my way and as a road-agent I made money, but my men robbed me, and I was hunted down by those two devils, Arizona Charlie and Diamond Dick."

"Do you see this scar?"

"Yes."

"Well, Diamond Dick's bullet made that and he calls it his brand."

"Look out for his next brand."

"Bah! I do not fear him, nor Arizona Charlie now."

"I am back in my retreat and I defy them all."

"I leave here to-night for a day or so, and yet leave to guard you three of my men."

"When I return I will have negotiated for your release, through a party I know."

"Now you know me as I am, you know just what to expect."

"You will understand that Major Muerte, the Chief of the Mounted Miners, is again on the war-path for gold, and I will have it, cost what it may, for what are men's lives to me?"

"If the ransom is paid then you are free to go your way."

"If it is not paid within a given time, then I shall kidnap the chaplain at Antelope Post, bring him here and force him to make you my wife."

"You have the alternative to write a letter to your father, and I will see that he gets it."

"I leave in half an hour, so have the letter ready."

He bowed politely and walked away, but within the stated time returned for the letter.

It was given him, and in it Viola had told all and made an appeal to have the ransom paid, for rescue was utterly impossible.

Soon after she saw the outlaw chief and three of his men leave the mountain park, leading their horses after them.

CHAPTER LXX.

THE RESCUERS.

It was just after dark when four men slipped into the mountain park, and soon after Viola, who was seated in front of her cabin, almost in despair, saw several flashes in quick succession and heard reports of revolvers rattling in echoes against the cliffs.

"I am rescued!"

"Thank Heaven!" she cried, and almost as she spoke, a tall man bounded toward her.

There was a pile of logs burning near, where her supper had been cooked by one of the outlaws, and by its light she beheld the form, as she believed, of the outlaw chief, Muerte.

No, his dress was not the same, and the words also undeceived her, for they were:

"Ah! there you are, Miss Viola!"

"Thank Heaven, you are safe!"

"Jack Joslyn!" she gasped.

"Yes, Miss Viola, Jack Joslyn, at your service, and happy in rescuing you, for though I did not capture my wicked brother, we killed several of his men and the others fled."

"See! yonder is Bert Rosser, whom you know, and several of his men, for they are the boys who aided me in my rescue."

Viola could not speak now, and sitting down on the seat she had risen from, she burst into tears.

Recovering herself as soon as she could, while Jack Joslyn threw some wood on the fire to brighten things up, she said:

"Oh, Jack! how you have been abused."

"But it will all come right now."

But even as she spoke there burst forth two wild war-cries, and the fires in the valley having been supplied with more wood, burned brightly up and revealed the tall forms of Arizona Charlie and Diamond Dick, revolvers in hand, dashing into the little park.

Behind them came Arizona Charlie's Angels, six in number, while another form swung back in the shadow of the cliffs near the pass.

At sight of the rescuers Jack Joslyn made a leap for the cabin, at the same time grasping Viola by the arm, while he said:

"I will sell my life dearly."

"Come! for they will not fire on me with you as my shield."

But with a cry Viola sprang away from him, and as she did so Jack Joslyn opened fire upon the two tall scouts advancing toward him.

"Up, men, and beat them back, or you all hang for this," cried Jack Joslyn, and his voice rung loudly through the park.

But his fire was answered by a shot from Arizona Charlie's revolver, which brought him to his knees, and before he could fire again, the scout had his pistol to his head and had wrested Joslyn's weapon from his grasp.

At the same time Diamond Dick had brought down an outlaw who proved to be Bert Rosser, while the others of the band shrieked lustily for quarter.

"Oh, sir, what does this mean?" and Viola turned to Arizona Charlie, who had just slipped a pair of handcuffs upon the wrists of Jack Joslyn.

"It means, Miss Viola, that we have caught Muerte and he is Jack Joslyn after all."

"But I was captured by Muerte, the twin brother of Jack, who rescued me, and—but I do not understand it all."

"I will explain that I played both parts, Viola Stanley, my brother and myself."

"I played the part of rescuing you from myself, pretending to have gone away this afternoon."

"Now you understand that I am Jack Joslyn and I am Muerte the outlaw."

"I do not mind making the confession, for though the wound I received from Arizona Charlie is not fatal, a dose of poison is, which I slipped into my mouth a moment ago, for I was not born to be hanged," and the outlaw laughed.

"But for the presence of this lady I would contradict that boast, sir, by having my men hang you up now," sternly said Arizona Charlie.

Viola stepped quickly toward him and said:

"No, let it be as it is."

"The man has shown how black his heart is, and I pity him."

"He believed, as others did, because I saved him from you, sir, that I loved him."

"It was not so; I only wished to return the debt of gratitude which I owed him for rescuing me from those kidnappers."

"Now he has proven himself my worst foe, but I forgive him, for see, he is dying."

It was the change in the face of Jack Joslyn that caused Viola to point to him, and taking her arm Diamond Dick led her away from the spot.

When she returned to her cabin an hour afterward Jack Joslyn was dead, and his body had been removed, and placed for burial along with those of Bert Rosser and two of his men who had fallen, in the fight with Arizona Charlie's Angels, after their pretended battle a short while before among themselves in carrying out their leader's plot of affected rescue of Viola.

CHAPTER LXXI.

CONCLUSION.

THE night passed away in the mountain retreat of Muerte, with Arizona Charlie and his Angels on guard.

Viola, after the excitement of the scene was over, slept soundly, and when she arose the next morning the bodies of the chief and his fellows had been buried, while the three prisoners were handcuffed and ready for the return trail, all of them in dire alarm at their fate.

The cache of the outlaws had panned out well, and what was found had been packed on the extra horses, and the contents of the trunk given to Viola by Jack Joslyn were wrapped up in a blanket and carried along also.

Viola's horse was led up for her after breakfast, and the party started on foot down the perilous trail, Arizona Charlie explaining to the rescued girl that Doc Daly had led them secretly to the retreat, after nightfall, and that the men he had with him were known as his Angels.

"Bless them all, they deserve the name," earnestly said Viola.

Upon reaching the base of the mountains, Diamond Dick called up the outlaw guide and said:

"Doc Daly, you kept your compact, so you are a free man."

"Here, take this money, there are a hundred dollars there, and try and lead an honest life, for if Arizona Charlie's Angels catch you in any more deviltry, they will hang you sure."

"Amen!" said the men in chorus, while Viola called out:

"Good-by, my man—here, let me shake hands with you, and let me beg you, for the sake of the mother you once loved, to lead a different life in future."

"I will, miss, I will," was the answer.

Whether Doc Daly kept his word or not I cannot say, but I believe that he did not, as a man answering his description was hanged in New Mexico some years after.

It was a glad surprise to Captain Stanley and his wife, when he arose one morning and beheld a cavalcade coming across the prairie, in the lead of which he recognized his daughter, Arizona Charlie and Diamond Dick.

There were others following, for Arizona Charlie had brought his Angels along as an escort of the maiden and the prisoners.

The voice of the captain aroused all in the cabin, and when the party dismounted at the gate they started with amazement, for there with Captain Stanley and his wife stood the very double of Jack Joslyn.

Quickly the captain explained that his guest was Mr. Jerrold Joslyn, who, with a party of cowboys as an escort, had been riding through the country in search of his twin-brother, Jack, who had gone to the bad years ago, but whom he hoped he could find and redeem from his wicked life.

So after all the story was true, of Jack Joslyn's twin-brother, only he had been the one who had been guilty of all the mean acts which he laid to his brother's account.

The whole story was told by Arizona Charlie, who went on with Diamond Dick and the prisoners to Fort Crag, the Angels turning back from the ranch to go to their homes in the Cliff-Dwellers' Canyon, and which after all did not pan out much of a find for them.

Having delivered the prisoners over to the keeping of Major Baldwin, Arizona Charlie and Diamond Dick went their separate ways in life, and to-day their home is in the Wild West, where they are justly numbered among the heroes of the Southwest mountains and plains.

Whatever her regard for Jack Joslyn might have been, it is certain that when Viola Stanley met his counterpart in looks, his opposite in character, in the person of his brother, she lost her heart to him, and a year after became his wife, and they now dwell in a handsome home by no means so far toward the land of the setting sun as was Stanley Ranch, to which happiness came through the daring deeds of the Oath-bound Rescuers.

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